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***'Machinations -- The Figure of Technology in the Writing of Modernity'***

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## Introduction

### Methodology, or a lack of principles (and no necessary connections).

The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical [...] and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out

only as glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of those misty haloes that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine.” Joseph Conrad,

*Heart of Darkness*

**tract** *n.* region or area of indefinite (usu. large) extent, (*a tract of sand, pathless tracts*)

C.O.D.

A university thesis, the concept of a thesis, implies a centre with regard to synchronic structure, and a trajectory in terms of its diachronic aspect (or a continuous development towards an endpoint). A *track* must be made across an open *tract*. However this dissertation finds itself in the theoretical contexts of a poststructuralism which propagates networks without centres or origin, and postmodernisms which discern a breakdown of narrative continuity, whether it be subjective and historical (Fredric Jameson) or with regard to philosophical legitimation (Jean-Francois Lyotard)<sup>1</sup>. When I say “contexts” I refer to more than a disengaged awareness of these vectors of thought, as happening elsewhere, useful here and there - the concerns and interests of this thought directly shape some of the views, contents and objects of this work. This leads to a small ethico-methodological problem; how (at what loss of engagement) can one then view this ‘content’ (of the work) as something separate from its ‘form’ (its narrative structure, or methodological principles)? In other words how does one still (now) *maintain* a *centred* focus or locus without some foundational hocus pocus? This thesis has no centre, and no teleological progression. This is not an excuse for laziness, or the inability to pull fragmented concerns together, but an intentional gesture towards avoiding a totalising logic and its various implications. These are then the reasons and pseudo-principles justifying the often discontinuous narrative progression of this thesis:

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<sup>1</sup> See Jameson’s ‘Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism’ and Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition*.

a) An overriding 'thesis', a recurring and persistent phrase, is insensitive to the fundamental and irreducible otherness of that which is represented.

b) The analysis attempts to work at a new mode of academic or critical discourse which doesn't rest on the laurels of the "grand narrative" or myth of unity, to challenge the sense of authority or legitimisation the university system as 'spirit' assigns to its various discourses and disciplines (Lyotard's thesis in *The Postmodern Condition*), the stabilised sense of academic place or orientation, the complacency with regard to intellectual role or functions. In other words to face the crisis of legitimisation and function that the critical discourses in the Arts and Humanities are beginning to experience.

c i) The forthcoming analysis strives to avoid the common dogmatism of treating 'theory' and 'literature' as two modes of expression diametrically opposed in their relation and access to the real or their referents, and of treating them separately and consecutively as separate entities. To deconstruct their 'respective' uses of literal and metaphorical modes I want to avoid using literary or cultural theory *on* literary or cultural texts, in other words, avoid the bogus meta-level positioning of the scientist above or outside the world he is examining or explaining (what could be called the empiricist illusion of objectivity). Literary criticism frequently 'interprets' a cultural text or texts merely to evidence a particular theory under the guise of explaining it. Criticism thus often involves a predictable process of recognition, one which tacitly privileges fact over fiction. Fredric Jameson wants to perpetuate or bolster the difference that Althusser maintains between what Lyotard would call the descriptive and the expressive phrase, a difference which "remobilises an older and henceforth classical Marxian distinction between science and ideology that is not without value for us even today" ('Postmodernism' 53). However I wish to examine how these allegedly abstract and hence 'non-representational' discourses actually end up, or start off, by "representing" (subjectively) in addition to "knowing" (objectively). In a nutshell, instead of finding facts in fiction, this method fictionalises all discourse, not to deny their generic differences but to find the figural in even factual language.

c ii) If theory is often prioritised, the subtle point of origin, the fixed centre of the critical discourse, the reverse is also often true. The *oeuvre* of a particular author, a genre or style, maybe even a single literary text provides the centre or stabilising focus of the whole system and various methodologies or tools are brought to bear on it. This kind of reverse domination thus emerges in criticism - this discussion will rather attempt to think the relationship between the genres of writing dialectically, in the Hegelian sense of being within each other. This makes particular sense when considering what this thesis is 'about' (in the loosest sense of this preposition); the relationship between science-fiction and scientific discourses in general, as the

hybrid name of the fictional genre suggests, is already incestuous. But the specific relationship between SF 'writing' and SF criticism appears to be almost unparalleled today, at least amongst literary genres, in the closeness and immediacy of the two domains. When one looks at the particular branch of SF literary criticism and theory that has grown through and out of the *Science Fiction Studies* journal, one detects what appears to be a quite unusual interpenetration and entanglement of discourses, where theories and criticism feed right back into the fictional streams. In the same edition (*SFS* #5, March 1975) one will find the arch-critic Jameson, the esteemed novelist Brian W. Aldiss, and the writer-critic Stanislaw Lem, all conversing on Philip K. Dick.. On the other hand the influence of the critics was so omnipresent or intense that the paranoid Dick renounces critics such as Jameson, Fitting and Lem to the FBI as KGB agents (Csicer-Ronay, xvi).

d) A related reason is to avoid the diagnostic power relation which come with the normative position offered by the medicalising discourses with regard to 'insanity'. One of the topics I pursue is that of paranoia and schizophrenia. Levelling the playing field means one can explore the paranoid core of some scientific or theoretical discourses, as well the more obvious ('literal') popular manifestations of paranoia. Instead of essentialising paranoia and schizophrenia, and bolstering the line between 'us' and 'them', the interest in these is to investigate the creative power of paranoia latent in popular cultural forms and texts.

### Thematic concerns and structure

The thesis is divided into three main sections; although there are four chapters, the first two constitute the first section, and the other two make up the second and third sections. These sections examine the theme of technology and the machine as Other to the human in progressively more immediate frames of reference, or what could be called contextual frameworks. In other words the structure follows a temporal or chronological logic, but *not* one which, with each leap, disposes of the last frame. The progression of foci involves an intensification of the lens power, each new frame within the last - like Deckard's remote-controlled blow-up of his video frame in *Blade Runner*. Yet unlike the detective we don't end up with a kernel of truth or a revelation, but the irreducible nexus of *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982 [and Philip K. Dick]), *Johnny Mnemonic* (Robert Longo, 1995 [and William Gibson]), and Fredric Jameson, a trinity of texts (the Father, Son and the Holy Ghost respectively), which open out on contexts and other texts, rather than release their hidden essences. Initially I discuss **modernity** as the outer shell or casing of my product (although there's no real product, it's all just layers of packaging). Here I examine the way in which SF

texts engage in the traditions, problems and debates that one associates with Enlightenment futurism and the discourse of modernity. One aspect of this which is of great interest to my work is the way in which SF mobilises and explores the traditional oppositions of Enlightenment and Romantic thought, the central anxiety being that Man, or his body, is becoming, or is already, a machine. This contradiction or conflict is manifested in various oppositions, man against technology, spirituality or subjective autonomy versus materialism, the body against the machine, production and reproduction, organic versus inorganic body parts, etc. The second section deals with what Jameson has identified as a discrete moment *within* the modernity of capitalism, **postmodernism** (late capitalism), a periodising of modernity which sees the transformation of our conventional notions of a semi-autonomous (Modernist) culture, and at the same time the massive reinvention of cultural and economic practices as marketing strategy. Within this 'last stage' of Capital, a further periodisation or categorisation takes place, in which the emerging discourses around computer and communicational technology crystallise and herald a new 'dawn' of society, Bush's New World Order, the end of history, a language we might provisionally call **cyberhype**. This space, the cultural or media space that has recently emerged as a hegemonic discourse, is postmodernism becoming quasi-conscious of itself, which, although making gestures towards some sense of a material reality and history, still serves classical (Althusserian) ideological functions.

### Modernity

In the sociology of modernity and capitalism the perennial analogy or metaphor of the *machine* of modernity often surfaces; whether it be an 'iron cage' or an invisible 'economic' dimension co-ordinating superstructural activities, a representational figure of the machine or social "mechanism" underlies the materialist and historical sociologies of Marx and Weber. The denaturalising effect, for which Nietzsche's genealogy is also responsible, involves the figuring of the social, of society, as something Other and vaguely threatening. However the major debate takes place between two writers before and after these great structural analyses. Immanuel Kant and Michel Foucault's theories of modern subjectivity provide us with the grand debate of subjective autonomy, or to what extent the logic of materialism, the causal logic of science, should be used to understand 'Man' or the human and social subject. Kant goes to great pains to show that Man is not a machine. He introduces the separate and supersensible faculty of Reason centred around the principle of subjective moral freedom, a logical system working above that of the Understanding, which merely works upon and with the world of objects. This could be read as making or preserving a space for the human soul.

Foucault, in his notorious *Discipline and Punish- The Birth of the Prison*, attempts to demonstrate how, amongst other guilty humanists, Kant and the Enlightenment project of modernity had as their hidden motive, the very reconstruction of the human body as a working and specialised machine. The modern soul, in a famous phrase, is in inverted reality “the prison of the body”. Here the discussion of schizophrenia under the sign of postmodernism is anticipated, and it is argued that ‘paranoia’ could be seen as an expressive and sublime metaphorical expression of what Foucault describes more literally: in other words, the coordinated construction of a modern subjectivity through discourses and technologies of power that operate on the body. The genealogical method, and his themes, however, manifest themselves in an earlier critique of Kant, in Nietzsche’s attack on slave morality or *ressentiment*<sup>2</sup>. SF, particularly the cyberpunk motif of the android or humanoid, partakes in this fracas over the ambiguity of the concept of the modern subject. The Replicants in *Blade Runner* extend and contribute to this long-standing philosophical problematic of the subject: autonomy, machinic obedience, slave morality.

#### **outline:**

The writing of the other of the human (which is also a defining of the human) is a semiotic project, which, in the Enlightenment, requires the figure of the machine, and sometimes that of the animal. Questions of subjectivity predominate and fuel this process; what is the essence of the human, and are we yet human? The journey towards enlightenment and emancipation is a key narrative which underlies the thinking of human history both then and now; the tale of freedom based on Kant’s schema is shown to inform the world and trajectory of *Blade Runner*. The second chapter on modernity looks at how Marx and Foucault are recipients of this emancipation story and respond to the antithetical figures of autonomous subject and the machine in their different ways.

### **Postmodernism**

Jameson’s theory is particularly suited to the other texts that form the nexus of this discussion. In the seminal essay ‘Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism’ he actually anoints *cyberpunk* as the heir apparent to his vision of properly political postmodernism, as the

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<sup>2</sup> Jameson sums up Nietzsche’s mythology: “Nietzsche’s whole historical vision, his historical master narrative, is organized around this proposition, which diagnoses ethics in general and the Judeo-Christian tradition in particular as a revenge of the slaves upon the masters and an ideological ruse whereby the former infect the latter with slave mentality - the ethos of charity - in order to rob them of their natural vitality and aggressive, properly aristocratic insolence” (*Political Unconscious* 201). For Foucault ethics is just one strategy of enslavement working to control the “natural vitality” of ‘the body’.



nearest thing to a contemporary political artform which maps out the individual's *non-imaginary* relation to the real conditions and the global. In this chapter we analyse in depth Jameson's theory of postmodernism, discerning: a) the distillation from popular (and intellectual) culture of an essence of "depthlessness" and the 'culture of the simulacrum', b) its diachronic correlation in the schizophrenic paradigm of both individual and collective obliteration of the past, a fragmented, hyperstimulated and charged perpetual present. This chapter also focuses on an evaluation of the schizophrenia paradigm, and discerns a undeclared opposition between catatonic schizophrenia and the paranoid type, the latter receiving Jameson's tacit approval.

**outline:**

The chapter starts with some speculation on the new effects of postmodernism- superficiality and a negation of ethics appear to herald a popular awareness of the materiality of culture-- cultural systems, such as the cinema, are seen as specific technologies with purely pleasure-orientated function. This sensibility allows one to reflect back on the emancipation narrative already identified in *Blade Runner*, and we now see how it is undermined. The co-existence of different ideologemes of modernity, some of which contradict each other, is analysed. The discussion then moves onto Jameson's theory of postmodernism, looking specifically at the culture of the simulacrum and the role technology plays in the deconstruction of the representation-reality dualism. The simulacrum theory is contextualised, and seen to be an amalgamation of ideas from Baudrillard, Debord and McLuhan. The section ends with an analysis of paranoid schizophrenia as a condition which involves a creative response to the new forms and dynamics of late capitalism.

### **Cyberpunk \ Cyberhype**

This chapter gets down to an exploration of a new sensibility or aesthetic situated in the present phase of postmodernism, a cultural response to overtly cybernetic conditions and environments provisionally called cyberhype. The focus here is on interdiscursive production of a dominant cultural space, a contemporary sociality or sense of collective project explicitly celebrating and mobilising (post)modern technology, in particular the figure of the network. This trope is explored quite extensively and quasi-critically in *Johnny Mnemonic's* high tech/low tech thematic opposition. Cyberhype, the excitement generated around the emergence of a new, distinctively postmodern 'power technology', is the most immediate context of cyberpunk, a context which it paradoxically helped pioneer. It includes innovations in popular dance music, the internet, and multimedia and virtual reality developments. The flip-side of this embracement of the new machine age is the paranoia, withdrawal and resistance of the anti-

State cult or alienated individual. This eschatological discourse resisting national hegemony and the techno-media is most visually manifested in the Branch Davidian cult, the Oklahoma bombing, Una bomber, or the Mid-West Militia who believe that American weather patterns are controlled by a CNN satellite -- apart from the usually right-wing politics these pockets of resistance are protocritical gestures. Here Jameson's distinction between "weak" postmodern films (which merely eulogise postmodern technology) and the few that manage to begin to represent the immense, unrepresentable structure of power and Capital behind the figure of the network, is of particular use in analysing the difference between the effects of most contemporary 'cyberspace' films and the slighter deeper *Johnny Mnemonic*<sup>3</sup>.

**outline:**

This final chapter attempts to interpret postmodernism as cybernetic age and involves a questioning of the innovation and political weight of the cyberpunk genre. The section follows on from the discussion of schizophrenia, and tackles the genealogy of the concept of the sublime. Moving from Kant's theorisation of the sublime, the analysis moves on to an in-depth investigation of Jameson's notion of a new (politicised) technological sublime, and the new figural role for technology. Armed with this criterion the section then meanders into a discussion of the definitions and claims of cyberpunk as literary movement. Cyberpunk is contextualised by tracing the influence of pop sociology, and other ideological and stylistic forces. In an attempt to theorise, or at least identify, a broader aesthetic, that of cybernetic fiction, the discussion returns to the theme of paranoia and its relation to the rise of performativity and efficiency as the new hegemonic legitimating principle that rules the cybernetic space of Late Capital. This involves trying to connect, Lyotard, Habermas, and the Frankfurt School around the common concept of instrumental reason and reification.

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<sup>3</sup> It is thus argued that *Johnny Mnemonic* does begin to meet Jameson's requirements for a 'deeper', more politically conscious text, that it offers a "glimpse into a postmodern or technological sublime" ('Postmodernism' 38).

## CHAPTER ONE : AUTONOMY AND AUTOMATON

If it were -- and thank God it is not -- expected of the anthropologist that he presage the future of humanity, no doubt he would conceive it, not as a prolongation or a transcendence of present forms, but rather on the model of an integration, progressively unifying the characteristics proper to cold societies [i.e., the type of order, approximated in archaic societies, which rests on the primacy of reversible, cyclical time] and hot societies [i.e., historically turbulent change and "progress", approximated in modern societies]. His reflection would take up the thread of the old Cartesian dream of placing machines, like automata, in the service of man. He would follow the traces of this dream in the social philosophy of the eighteenth century up until and Saint-Simon. For, in announcing the passage "from the government of men to the administration of things," the latter anticipated the distinction between [material] culture and society and the conversion, which information theory and electronics enable us at least to perceive as possible, from a type of civilization which historical becoming inaugurated in the past-- but at the price of a transformation of men into machines -- to an ideal civilization which could succeed in transforming machines into men. Then, culture having received the burden of manufacturing progress, society would be liberated from the millennial curse which forced it to enslave men in order to progress. Thenceforth, history could make itself.

Claude Levi-Strauss, 'Lecon inaugurale'

(quoted in Dominick LaCapra, *Emile Durkheim: Sociologist and Philosopher*)

## Introduction: The Spectral Metaphor of the Machine

The epigraph to Philip K. Dick's 'Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?' contains a strange fragment of information which appears to be a cutting from a newspaper article reporting from Auckland in 1966. Although there is no reasonable way of substantiating whether it is part of the fictional artifice of Dick's story, the reader will probably feel that the date, close to that of its publication, weights the interpretation towards it being 'real'. But apart from introducing the meta-theme or overarching textual strategy of undecidability, and pointing to the instability of oppositions that will ensue, this particular oscillation between 'fact' and 'fiction' is not what is of interest to us in the article. It tells of a turtle that was given to the King of Tonga, presumably an important leader, by Captain Cook in 1777, and which had just died nearly 200 years later.

The animal, called Tu'Imalila, died at the royal palace ground in the Tongan capital of Nuku, Alofa.

The people of Tonga regarded the animal as a chief and special keepers were appointed to look after it. It was blinded in a bush fire a few years ago.

What immediately astonishes the Western reader is the importance and value lent to or imposed on the turtle. Not only is the turtle given human status through a name, in itself an extraordinary act of empathy not usually present in human-animal relationships<sup>1</sup>, but it is additionally invested with the power of a leader, *who* requires "special keepers". The article foregrounds the process by which culture projects and confers values on its domain or terrain. Culture recognises and ignores entities as subjects - here the turtle is recognised as a subject, or rather as a super-subject, a leader. We are used to or familiar with the concept of 'animals' constituting a semiotic Other by or against which we, as 'humans', are partly defined in opposition. This process of differentiation allows us to eat them, make us work for them, etc., although the above example makes us conscious of the varying degrees of emphasis different cultures put on this difference. The creativity of culture when it so visibly invests, if not invents, subjectivity infects the reader's own sense of what it is to be a subject in society. This turtle tale thus forces home the anthropological realisation that the rules, rights and principles regarding human subjectivity, or the status and powers attending the position of a *conferred* subjectivity within any culture are both *arbitrary* and *necessary*. 'Arbitrary' here means culturally and linguistically produced and contingent, as opposed to 'natural' and universal - permutations of subjectivity are foregrounded as constructed fictions, via the privileged status of the turtle. 'Necessary', on the other hand, refers to a contradictory sense that this recognising of subjects, this treating of subjects differently from objects in the world, is, although peculiar to a culture, nevertheless a fundamental, empirically recurring and inevitable distinction, recognised and produced by all cultures and languages. Subjectivity is thus a necessary myth or fiction. We shall see that the philosophical theme of the importance of animals as pets, even when they are mechanical, play a significant role for humans in

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<sup>1</sup> Apart from the pet phenomenon, animals are generally *used* and considered dispensable by humans.

both 'Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?' and *Blade Runner*, and at the same time contribute to the deconstructive confusion attending the main theme of the human-machine difference.

This is of course Kant's central and persistent theme: the distinctively human or intersubjective world (the moral realm) *must* be considered as something apart from the objective world of things. In other words the scientific, deterministic logic put to work on the latter should not be applied to the realm of subjects. Humans are essentially - or at least should be - free beings, not things. This is more a prescription than an objective description, a principle without which proper social being would not be possible. Consequently, the subject-subject relationship is fundamentally different from the subject-object relation. For Kant's writing the distinction between the 'human' and the 'non-human' or 'Nature' (whether it be turtles or mountains) is a persistent textual opposition, a motif that surfaces in the various distinctions between *phenomena* and *noumena*, the faculties of Reason and Understanding, and in the theory of the sublime (which opposes the perceiving subject to the threatening other of Nature). Kant feels that the human-moral realm of intersubjectivity is threatened by the natural-mechanistic realm, that it needs to be defended, shored up against the growing power of scientific explanation. In Beck's introduction to his edition of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* this concern is analysed:

The ultimate issue which Kant faced consists in the logical incompatibility between the objective and subjective conditions of scientific knowledge. It is the disharmony between the object of science and the human ends it is made to serve. In the Renaissance, after Galileo, Descartes and Newton had banished purpose from nature, nature came to be seen as a vast mechanism. With the replacement of Aristotelian ideas by mechanistic conceptions, science began to achieve unprecedented control over nature. A similar change of viewpoint in Hobbes, Spinoza and Harvey with regard to man's own body and mind opened the way for analogous advances in the control of man.

But control for what? It is man who develops science and through it controls nature for his own purposes. There lies the paradox: man is understood as a machine, but the use of his knowledge of himself and of the external world is thoroughly purposive. (1)

For Kant science had to serve the higher human ideal and purpose of freedom to be worthwhile; hence the faculty of Understanding and its sensible world was subordinated to Reason and its supersensible dimension. The delimitation and mapping of the incommensurable 'realms' of ethics (reason) and science (understanding) constitute the essence of Kant's intellectual project. What I attempt to map in this section (the following two chapters) is an incomplete and discontinuous repetition of the conceptual dualism of the 'human' and its other, the 'non-human', represented by the alternate, and at times synonymous, figures of the 'machine' and the 'animal'. This entails a genealogy of figuration that moves disjunctively from Enlightenment philosophy to the cybernetic or cyberpunk sub-genre. The idea is to contextualise this central if not obsessional theme of the cybernetic aesthetic, to historicise its

philosophical problematic; hopefully it will be demonstrated that this 'new' form is doing old philosophical work, and that in turn philosophy partakes in a bit of science-fiction.

Although there are many 'others' to the conceptualization of the 'human', such as the 'animal', 'nature', the 'machine' or 'technology', they tend to converge under the sign of the 'mechanism' or 'machine' in modernity, and especially in postmodern space. Since Descartes's treatment of animals as automata, as pure mechanical bodies without souls and thus immune to pain, the figure of the animal has often been deployed as a substitute for the machinic other of human subjectivity. No less an authority on the human machine than Norbert Wiener, the idolized founder of cybernetics, confirms that "Descartes considers the lower animals as automata ...to avoid questioning the orthodox Christian attitude that animals have no souls to be saved or damned" (*Cybernetics* 41). Even Kant's 'pure idea' of the whole of Nature which confronts the perceiving subject as a totality is understood as a giant mechanism, a natural machine that appears to be designed with a purpose and by a designer - this connotative property obviously becomes even more prominent with the development and geopolitical spread of colonialism and industrialisation and the increasing domination of lived space by capitalism. The process described above, essentially of conquering Nature, is what Jameson reworks as the postmodern sublime: where Kant's theory of the sublime involved the subject encountering the raw ferocity, omnipotence and magnitude of nature as a totality, Jameson maintains that this power is taken up by a technology and economic order which, in colonising what was previously seen as the untamed system of nature, takes on its menacing and antithetical properties for the perceiving subject. Technology and the world economic system eventually assume the role projected onto Nature in Kant's time, that which is other to the human. However the transition from Kantian to postmodern sublime, as the mapping of the man-machine relation onto the macro-dimensions of humanity versus technology, or man against the totality or system, is a topic for the following chapter. Here I want to confine the focus to retracing the mutation of the simple textual relation between the autonomous subject and its figural nemesis, the machine or automaton, and its various substitutions in the writing of modernity.

Apart from this genealogy or diachronic aspect of the man-machine dualism, which attempts to show the mutation of this binary opposition, a simply synchronic or ahistorical perspective provides the ground for another mode of interrogating the figure of technology. What I want to show in Hegelian fashion is the perpetual conceptual interdependence of the human and its other, a semiotic symbiosis: even when Kant talks of the majority, agency or moral autonomy of the enlightened subject the figure of the machine haunts his discourse and emerges at certain junctures. In their respective accounts of the tragedy of modernity Marx and Foucault also attempt to uncover the repressed of history, a degraded and abused body which is located just beneath the surface veneer of humanist history and philosophy. For both these writers the progress of capitalism or modernity is the massive lie that our world is becoming more 'human'; their writing shares a common strategy of revelation, inversion, a turning of the tables - exposing how it in fact becomes less human or natural and more mechanistic. For early

Marx the repressed truth is a human essence, for Foucault the invested body. Although Foucault might deny any such moral outrage the position from which he speaks indicates a case of what Habermas discerns as 'cryptonormativism', or "the arbitrary partisanship of a criticism that cannot account for its normative foundations" (*Philosophical Discourse on Modernity*, 276)<sup>2</sup>.

So far I have been discussing the figure of the machine as a static conceptual entity - but 'figure' has another shade of meaning, referring to a distinctly human personality or character. We talk of a 'major figure' in the art world, in history etc. In addition to the essentially synchronic (linguistic or symbolic) difference between man and machine, what needs to be addressed is the specific deployment or appearance of this dualism (that of man-machine, humanity-technology) in a proto-narrative, or what we could simply call a recurring myth. Hayden White points to a basic desire, a human essence in narrative, saying that "far from being a code among many that a culture may utilize for endowing experience with meaning, narrative is a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted" ('The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality' 6). In other words the man-machine opposition could be reinterpreted as the effect of a more primitive and sub-conscious narrative of escape from a world of necessity or slavery. In this myth, a story which we might call after Lyotard the 'myth of emancipation' (but perhaps meaning more than just an historical form of legitimation)<sup>3</sup>, the hero or central *figure* undergoes a journey of enlightenment or self-discovery, in which he moves from a state of bondage or machine-like enslavement to one of freedom (whether it be moral, intellectual, or economic). This chapter explores the various slightly differing versions of this essentially unchanging myth, and maintains against the dominant currents of poststructuralism that even where scientific discourse posits and seems to operate in a post-narrative systemic mode it is not so much a founding dualism which grounds, for instance, Kant's architectonic - it is often rather a hidden myth, with powerful allegorical dimensions. While poststructuralism's insistence of semiotic play on the surface of meaning denies the

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<sup>2</sup>In 'Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again' Habermas points out Foucault's methodological or stylistic hypocrisy of a prejudiced or false positivism. On the one hand Foucault "scoffs at the 'gauchist dogma' which contends that power is what is evil, ugly, sterile and dead ... For him there is no 'right side' " (282), but on the other hand his theorisation of power seems to imply some normative evaluation of it: "if one tries to glean the standards implicitly appealed to in his indictments of disciplinary action one encounters familiar determinations from the normativistic language games he has explicitly rejected" (284). If we accept Habermas' point we find the great anti-humanists are in fact ultra-humanists, whose intensity of response to reification, commodification or power is really a measure of their sense of the colonisation of a properly human-moral topography of freedom. In this sense neither Marx nor Foucault escape what Kant calls the regulatory or pure idea of freedom elusively hidden in the faculty of Reason.

<sup>3</sup>Lyotard sees two principle forms of narrative legitimation grounding knowledge and education in the European culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: "The mode of legitimation we are discussing, which introduces narrative as the validity of knowledge, can thus take two routes, depending on whether it represents the subject of the narrative as cognitive or practical, as a hero of knowledge or a hero of liberty" (*The Postmodern Condition*, 31). He puts an expiry date on this though, saying that "the grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation" (37). For our purposes, however, the waxing and waning of the legitimating power of the freedom fable is not of much concern. Rather, with Jameson, the emphasis here is on the transhistorical and transgeneric mythic power of this kind of narrative dynamic.

depth of the deep-structures of structuralism, this analysis reactivates this discarded master-model of depth and argues the importance, perhaps even the determining priority, of narrative structure underlying human consciousness. This is of particular importance to our present cultural dominant which sees a historically unprecedented cultural *spatiality* hostile to temporal forms, more particularly science silencing the mythological constructions of narrative. The delegitimation of narrative blinds us to its centrality.

Even if this proves to be too big a statement to maintain, what can at least be confidently asserted is that the historically delimited philosophical discourse of modernity is firmly rooted in narrative power or legitimation. Lyotard points out how modernity paradoxically reinvests in (grand) narrative as an authority at the same time as expanding the realm of scientific or empirical logic at the expense of narrative. He discerns a “renewed dignity for narrative (popular) cultures, already noticeable in Renaissance Humanism and variously present in the Enlightenment, the *Sturm und Drang*, German idealist philosophy, and the historical school in France. Narration is no longer an involuntary lapse in legitimation. The explicit appeal to narrative in the problematic of knowledge is concomitant with the liberation of the bourgeois classes from the traditional authorities” (*The Postmodern Condition* 30). The two dominant myths assert ‘the people’ as the subject or hero of liberty, and ‘the University’ as the hero of knowledge (31-2). Later on he makes it clear that even Marxism makes use of the two major forms of narrative legitimation, involving the heroes of liberty and knowledge he has discussed: “The Party takes the place of the University, the proletariat that of the people or of humanity” (36-7). But if Lyotard confines the emergence and functionality of this ‘particular’ myth to a specific historical period, there is also support for the view of a transhistorical emancipation narrative. Jameson, in *The Political Unconscious*, suggests that the emancipation or struggle narrative is an allegorical dimension to all cultural texts, and a myth recurring across different modes of production (*Political Unconscious* 19-20). After quoting a famous sentence from Marx and Engels’ “The Communist Manifesto”, a passage which starts with “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle: freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian . . .”, Jameson explains how his project involves the revelation of a core, recurring story of struggle towards emancipation: “It is in detecting the traces of that uninterrupted narrative, in restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental history, that the doctrine of a political unconscious finds its function and its necessity” (20). Jameson here seems to be replacing the ‘real’ *history* of Marx’s discourse with *story*, where the repressed is a narrative of sorts -- this will be examined in more detail. More immediately, in the discussion below of Kant’s philosophy we see how he articulates autonomy as diachrony, as a narrative quest, and modulates the story to fit the context of the rationalisation processes of a modernising society.



### REPLI-KANT (thinker, tinker...)

The conferral of subjectivity in the turtle episode quoted above suggests the *leitmotiv* of Kant's work; within the broader project of a demarcation of philosophy into autonomous realms, he was particularly concerned to see the establishment of an independent sphere of human-orientated knowledge relating to morality and intersubjectivity, around the central principle of the *recognition* of subjectivity and subjective freedom. This was a difference already acknowledged in the separate fields of ethics and metaphysics or ontology, but Kant attempted to work at revealing the fundamental or transcendental principles of the moral world or the domain of 'practical Reason', the ground rules which enabled the very possibility of ethical thought and behaviour. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant puts forward four antinomies which illustrate the impasse between the rationalist and empiricist modes of reasoning. The Third Antimony contrasts a Thesis which maintains that "causality in accordance with the laws of nature is not the only causality from which the appearances of the world can one and all be derived. To explain these appearances it is necessary to assume that there is also another causality, that of freedom" and an Antithesis which asserts "there is no freedom; everything in the world takes place solely in accordance with the laws of nature" (quoted in Owen, 10-11). These perspectives appear to contradict or undermine each other and provide an unresolvable aporia - either everything is determined, or some things are immune to determinism (and there are first causes or origins). Kant reconciles these competing views by positing two autonomous legislative realms of reason, the realm of theoretical reason and that of practical reason (everything, including humanity, is causally determined *and* yet we are also free). Kant argues that "The legislation of human reason (philosophy) has two objects, nature and freedom, and therefore contains not only the law of nature, but also the moral law, presenting them at first in two distinct systems, but ultimately in one single philosophical system. The philosophy of nature deals with all *that is*, the philosophy of morals with that which *ought to be*" (quoted in Beck, 15). *Theoretical* reason operates within and upon a phenomenal world of appearances, and is grounded in the faculty of understanding; it provides knowledge of the empirical world of objects. *Practical* reason deals with noumena, things-in-themselves, which aren't knowable or representable, and it is established *a priori* in the faculty of reason. Kant argues that cause and effect (as well as time and space) are part of our perceptual apparatus, a way of seeing the world which projects itself onto it; as a facilitative or mediating mechanism the appearance-orientated explanatory system of cause and effect is thus entirely inadequate for dealing with the invisibility of the sensibly inaccessible 'noumenal' dimension.

This split implies a duality in the subject, between a self which is able to perceive itself as an empirical object (i.e. as *phenomenal*, or as appearance) and a self which is able to know himself as a transcendental self (i.e. *noumenon*, or as a 'thing-in-itself'), where the former is determined or conditioned (by the laws of nature), entangled in the net of cause-and-effect and the latter is a free, rational will (obliged and guided by moral laws), with the capacity to be the origin of actions and

events. This is quite a strange inversion of the linguistic order: the abstract property of 'autonomy' is rethought as a noun (thing-in-itself), while the noun or 'thingness' of the 'body' is rethought as an adjective (appearance). The concept of freedom arises out of the unconditioned causality realised by and peculiar to rational beings. "As a rational being and thus as belonging to the intelligible world, man cannot think of the causality of his own will except under the idea of freedom, for independence from the determining world of sense (an independence which reason must always ascribe itself to) is freedom" ('Foundations of a Metaphysics of Morals' 107). This transcendental subjectivity is a unique supplement to what humanity otherwise shares with the rest of the world of objects (indeed it is our human essence) - 'being' as being merely a part of the grand machine of nature. In this respect, in the opposition of a world of Freedom to that of Necessity, Kant's theory can be seen to be harbouring that fugitive fable that Jameson alleges Marxism releases into the light of day. Marxism tells the ultimate story, the only *one*, which is the final yet repressed allegorical dimension of all narratives: "These matters can recover their original urgency for us only if they are retold within the unity of a single great collective story; only if, in however disguised and symbolic a form, they are seen as sharing a single fundamental theme -for Marxism, the collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity\*; only if they are grasped as vital episodes in a single, vast unfinished plot" (*Political Unconscious*, 19-20). The origin of this opposition of the "realm of Freedom" to the "realm of Necessity" is explained in a lengthy footnote quoting an extract from Marx's *Capital*. Following Kant's model Marx discusses the perennial battle between 'man' and the "blind forces of Nature", between menial, material production and that supersensible realm, still to come, which lies "beyond" it: "The realm of freedom actually begins only where labor which is in fact determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases . . . Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which however can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis" (*Political Unconscious* 19). As will become evident a bit further on, the human as "end in itself" criterion is what Kant claims paves the way for an eventual 'realm of ends' where humans are more than just the means to an end.

But how does Kant make the leap from a free will which is able to initiate spontaneous action to 'moral freedom'? He discerns a realm of necessity or causality which only applies to rational beings living within language, subjects who are subject to linguistic imperatives of the order of "ought": "All imperatives are expressed by an "ought" and thereby indicate the relation of an objective law of reason to a will which is not in its subjective constitution necessarily conditioned by this law" ('Foundations of a Metaphysics of Morals' 72). In this domain there are rules which govern the dimension of social behaviour and interaction, but which don't mechanically determine how one acts, functioning rather as "constraint". These rules or imperatives exist to regulate or control the subject's behaviour when it is still motivated by specific empirical ends, when it acts subjectively. However when the finally perfectly rational being cuts itself off completely from the empirical world of material ends (as would a divine

will) and acts morally for the sake of the pure moral law of practical reason alone, i.e. acts objectively, for the sake of the 'good', then constraints are not necessary and the subject cannot be thought of as being constrained: "The 'ought' is here out of place, for the volition of itself is necessarily in unison with the law" (73). For humans, who are not perfect moral beings (although we should strive to be), the will is constrained by 'duty' to the moral law. Yet we should be grateful, for this is the only free zone, in which the subject is able to realise (both intellectually and practically) his freedom in the human will. Thus the human subject is free to a degree in his social world and conduct but determined in his natural environment - subjectivity is made free, or its freedom is only enabled in or recognised, by the moral law. The moral law is the only condition of freedom. Thus, as David Owen says, "to act freely is, for Kant, to act morally" (*Maturity and Modernity* 11). But for Kant morality or the moral law and duty is more than an arbitrary set of prescriptions. Behind the rules governing or shaping human interaction lies the supreme moral principle that one expects others to respect your freedom as you respect theirs. This is expressed in Kant's famous categorical imperative: "Act always according to that maxim whose universality as a law you can at the same time will" ('Foundations of a Metaphysics of Morals' 94). The free subject wills the collective or universal will, so that the social world or public space she finds herself inhabiting respects human freedom, thereby ensuring her own and others' freedom.

In the 'Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals' Kant asserts the basic difference in value between the world of persons and that of objects. In a surprisingly direct and expressive passage Kant explains that

beings whose existence does not depend on our will but on nature, if they are not rational beings, have only a relative worth as means and are therefore called "things"; on the other hand, rational beings are designated "persons", because their nature indicates that they are ends in themselves, i.e. things which may not be used merely as means. Such a being is thus an object of respect and, so far, restricts all [arbitrary] choice. Such beings are . . . beings whose existence in itself is an end (86-7)<sup>4</sup>.

The recognition of humans as ends in themselves is a necessary step towards understanding Kant's thesis that the human subject is essentially (should be) a legislator in the "realm of ends" (95). This kingdom or realm of ends is a Utopian state in which each human subject legislates for himself in accordance with the principle that it should hold for everyone, and respect their status as ends and fellow legislators.

What is striking at this stage is the resolution of the third antimony in an uncompromisingly dualist philosophy which insists on the coexistence of contradictory causalities, one for Nature the mechanism, and one for Humanity, the rational will. We should note however that these logical systems are not seen as having equal status - Kant feels obliged to defend a 'higher' morality under threat from

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<sup>4</sup> Marx echoes the sentiment, as we have seen: "Beyond it [material "realm of necessity"] begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself"

expanding science and technology. Although neither sphere manages to obliterate the other, Kant emphatically insists throughout his work that practical reason is the 'higher' dimension or world, the dimension which is the most appropriate for the human. As Owen points out it is a defensive act: "The mutually exclusive positions expressed in the antimony arise, for Kant, out of the tendency of theoretical reason to transgress its limits, to overstep the boundaries of experience within which it holds sway" (*Maturity and Modernity* 11). Simply put, theoretical reason needs to be kept in its place. The result of this, with regards to thinking about human nature or the human condition, is a spectral or phenomenal world underlying or overlaying (incommensurable yet coexistent with) the moral law or practical reason, *in and from which* humans are seen to be partly conditioned by the same infinitely regressive chain of cause-and-effect that seems to work for the rest of nature (a boundless, chaotic world which Derrida's metonym *différance* begins to evoke). Kant often uses the metaphor or simile of the machine to describe this other totality of the mechanical world or 'realm of nature', in which the human can no longer be considered autonomous; he mentions "the natural whole is looked upon as a machine" ('Foundations of a Metaphysics of Morals' 95). Through this dialectical frame we are seen as absolutely free yet also infinitely conditioned, although Kant finds the former a more appropriate, authentically human way of viewing humanity: this subjective, 'humanist' intuition is ultimately the only reason he can provide for privileging it. Unfortunately he cannot exorcise the equally insistent 'fact' or proposition that humans are also part of the mechanism of nature, and the spectre of determinism hangs over a "higher" human autonomy.

In the properly animal world of sense the human *noumenon* is thus transfigured into a ghostly *phenomenon*, an automaton, or a being upon which and through whom causal energy flows like a current and whose every move is determined by everything (and infinity ) but the self. Norbert Wiener recounts the history of the automaton, his figure of preference for thinking 'the human machine', a description which includes Leibniz's monads.

Each of them lives in its own closed universe , with a perfect causal chain from the creation or from minus infinity in time to the indefinitely remote future; but closed though they are, they correspond one to the other through the pre-established harmony of God. Leibniz compares them to clocks which have been wound up so as to keep time together from the creation of all eternity. Unlike human clocks they do not drift into asynchronism; but this is due to the miraculously perfect workmanship of the Creator.

Thus Leibniz considers a world of automata, which, as is natural in a disciple of Huygens, he constructs after the model of clockwork. Though the monads reflect one another, the reflection does not consist in a transfer of the causal chain from one to another. They are actually as self-contained as, or more self-contained than, the passively dancing figures on top of a music dance. They have no real influence on the outside world,

nor are they effectively influenced by it. As he says, they have no windows. (*Cybernetics* 41)

It becomes obvious why Kant is so keen to create a human causality of spontaneous action, chains of effects stemming from human origins, outside of the infinitely regressive causality of the natural world. Essentially he wants to exorcise the automaton and replace it with an autonomous subject. Additionally Kant indicates time and again that freedom of the will and the noumenal rational world is open not to just humans but to “rational beings” as free agents in general. These two features, the dual-world paradigm or dialectical mechanism of thinking the human, plus the acceptance of any vaguely humanoid subject, makes his theory particularly useful - if not indispensable - for understanding the pseudo-anthropological differentiation of ‘Replicant’ and ‘human’ worlds in Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (as well as anticipating more generally the sci-fi arch-theme of artificial intelligence and the recurring trope of the cyborg).

In *Blade Runner* ‘Replicants’ are biologically manufactured worker-slaves devised to do dirty work for humans, and as manifestations of the science-fiction category of robots, humanoids or androids they constitute a repressed Other to the properly human. The cyborg-human difference immediately and intuitively signals their inorganic-organic essences, which mobilise the slavery-freedom dualism and other related oppositions. In other words, in Jameson’s language, this is just another - perhaps more open or conscious manifestation of the old repressed story of the human struggle for freedom, in which the hero is a slave, a slave class or even the whole of humanity in general (depending on the allegorical level) who tries to move from the “realm of Necessity” or unfreedom to one of Freedom, or perhaps even to transform the former into the latter. As Jameson suggests, Marxism is only able to articulate more clearly what is a time-old Utopian impulse, present in the ‘anagogical’ level of Medieval hermeneutics and media-age advertising alike: “the collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom out of a realm of Necessity” (*Political Unconscious* 9). Necessity is a sub-human world, the world of exploitation, privation and subalternity, of menial, bodily labour (as described by Marx); it is also the world of mechanical bodies, predetermined mechanical ‘death’ (the Replicants have an unalterably fixed lifespan), lack of purposiveness and recognition of purposiveness (dignity), and the wholesale reduction of the subject to a means (the spectre of Kant’s humanity). This master-code, Freedom out of Necessity, then activates or enables an analogical connection with a whole set of subsidiary stories of the same order, the illegal alien hunted in the First World city (individual or community against the totality), persecuted Jews in Nazi Germany, people with HIV struggling against a hostile majority (death-sentences for minorities).

There are also correspondences between the Replicants’ predicament and Kant’s Utopia of a “realm of ends”. In *Blade Runner* we find a bunch of renegade latest-model Nexus-6 Replicants from an off-world colony running amok in this world (planet earth). This description “running amok” is somewhat perversely sarcastic as one of the thematic ironies the film hammers home is what little social

effect these new anthropomorphic additions to the streets actually have. This tiny group of renegade workers hardly threatens humanity at large. They must be “retired” merely on principle, a principle applied mechanically in a cold, relentless and brutally ‘human’ causality- this is heightened to a supremely obvious moment in the scene where Deckard *kills* a Replicant (the Snake Dancer), where we see a naked, vulnerable and blood-spattered female body flailing - and ultimately, tragically *failing* - through sheets of glass, as she is shot from behind. The translucent, plastic garment she wears and the transparent panes of glass quite literally exacerbate the spillage of blood, and more figuratively contribute to the sense of representational clarity appealed to, the obviousness and decisiveness of an act of murder, of killing “in cold blood” (a signified additionally hammered home by the gender relation, the male-on-female violence). At this nodal point in the narrative, the title of the film itself becomes unavoidably ironic; “blade runner” becomes a bald euphemism for “killer” or “executioner”, a transparent lie which casts metonymic ethical doubt on the whole of the legal-political apparatus, which in turn brings into question the integrity of the whole system.

logical associations:	Humanity\Earth\LA	Replicants\Colonies
	“kingdom of ends”	mechanism of nature
	free, enlightened community	“part of a mechanism”
	purposive	means to an end
textual inversion :	Replicants	Humans

Deckard’s act of murder plays quite an important role in pushing the story into Jameson’s third ‘anagogic’ level of allegory developed in *The Political Unconscious*. The first level of meaning involves seeing the individual text as a ‘socially symbolic act’ attempting a fantasy or imaginary resolution of a real social contradiction. His second level of meaning is one in which the individual text partakes in class warfare, or at least as *ideologeme* exists as testimony to the larger, transpersonal discourses of class. These are the fairly obvious connotations the Replicant-Humanity opposition signals to begin with; Replicants are labour (the realm of Necessity), humanity is capital (the realm of Freedom), or the ruling class; one is determined, the other is free. However Jameson posits a third level which involves an even longer wave-length of struggle, that of the whole of society; here the tension is on a larger scale, between modes of production, a society struggling with itself to become free. For Jameson this is really the final horizon of the cultural artifact, implicit and unconscious yet embedded in the text, waiting to be glossed by the analyst, yet already at work in its dynamics. The second level of class rhetoric doesn’t negate the third dimension of Utopian longing, rather it enables it: “*all* class consciousness - or in other words, all ideology in the strongest sense, including the most exclusive forms of ruling-class consciousness just as much as that of oppositional or oppressed classes - is in its very nature Utopian” (*Political Unconscious* 289). This exorbitant proposition is explained a bit

further on, where Jameson insists “the achieved collectivity or organic group of whatever kind - oppressors fully as much as oppressed - is Utopian not in itself, but only insofar as all such collectivities are themselves *figures* for the ultimate concrete collective life of an achieved or Utopian or classless society” (291). In *Blade Runner* this deepest of narratives kicks in when the Replicants begin to appear more human than human, offering itself as a fairly explicit reading of this usually heavily disguised human-historical struggle. The allegorical charge of the oppressed realms is swapped around: it is not the Replicants who need to be liberated finally but the human pseudo-world of reification and instrumental reason - the whole capitalist mode of production (now the realm of Necessity) needs to be emancipated by a form of socialism (the realm of Freedom). In this conflict between modes of production the fragile yet emergent socialist or Utopian mode of production is symbolised by the close-knit intersubjectivity of the Replicants, which is discussed in some detail further on.

However one should be careful of a too obvious reading of the Replicants ‘positive’ value (as revolutionaries, or ethical ‘moral beings’). While at the level of content (a semiotic reading) they present themselves as human, all too human, at the level of form (or narrative development and closure) they remain irredeemably Other. This can be interpreted as a deeply ambivalent response to the various meanings and affects attached to the figure of technology. A strange doubling takes place in which the other world, the machinic ‘realm of nature’, returns to haunt Los Angeles, the city of angels and the kingdom of ends. The automaton enters the world of autonomy and shows himself to be more human than the truly human, to reveal the sham of the moral law which respects “rational beings” as ends in themselves. The redemption scene which sees the Replicant leader Roy Batty’s final forgiveness of the helpless Deckard (he finds himself in a position where he has the shattered Deckard utterly at his mercy) stands in stark contrast to Deckard’s lack of empathy, and his cold-blooded actions. As we shall see, Kant’s definition of ‘private reason’, that provisionally necessary and part-time subject-position which allows the human to become “part of the mechanism” and obey commands from a superior in a hierarchical organisation, is exemplified by the avenging angel, Deckard, who just does his job, carrying out orders from above. Indeed the fairly explicit Christian imagery deployed in these scenes of narrative denouement (as well as Batty’s own personal ending) in and about Sebastian’s building heightens one’s already acquired sense of Batty’s messianic charisma and additionally fixes it as a specifically Christian resonance. In attempting to hold onto his life-force just a little longer he sticks a rather Roman-sized nail through his hand, quite unmistakably evoking the crucifixion, and the ensuing pain gives him another spurt of energy, another short lease on life<sup>5</sup>. But while Jesus, the originator of

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<sup>5</sup> Of course the ‘lease on life’ metaphor is itself a theme central to the politics of the film, which stands in for all sorts of peculiarly postmodern anxieties and anger about the unscrupulous extension of reification and privatisation to hitherto unexploited spheres - here we have an allegorical level referring to the penetration of the commodity-form into the arena of the body (the commodification of medicalised life), the same story as the medical aid running out and then switching off the life-support system, a now downgraded state health

the moral law, died nailed to a cross for our sins, departing this world to join his father so that we could follow him, Batty has killed his father (Tyrell) and nails himself to nothing, for nothing or no-one (apart from perhaps teaching Deckard a lesson), only to remain in our world, this world. This refiguration of the crucifixion tells a vaguely existentialist tale of disappointment at the hollowness of the 'moral law' - the lie of a kingdom of ends here on earth under capitalism - and of religion more generally, the impotence of the Father to change or maintain what he has made.

But as death and departure it also performs the less obvious function of sealing off the human world from that of the threatening Other, the alien - in this case the mechanical world of the pseudo-human. If the figure of the Replicant destabilises the human-machine difference in its presence the diachronic aspect of the narrative structure enacts a kind of ritual cleansing in its closure - although they come to haunt they are finally exorcised, chased away<sup>6</sup>. We end up where we started, a formally pleasing symmetry in which we are left with a biologically pure or 'cleansed' population - and hence a semiotically sustainable definition of humanity. This brings us to the dark side of the figure of the robot, cyborg or humanoid in the science-fiction genre. The horrific otherness of the life conditions of the human machine or slave (or the proletariat) can lead to an empathetic stirring or awakening in the viewer, which can constitute the impulse to liberate the other from his misery. But on the other hand, if the Other (robot, cyborg, android) is sufficiently 'Othered', one can write off its condition as irredeemable, appropriate, and possibly even revel in its suffering and its irrecoverable otherness. This persecutory pleasure, in eradicating a minority, a weaker adversary, is the flip-side of the Utopian aspirations discussed above. Persecution, whether it be the witch-hunt or genocide, can only be rewritten as symbolically or *figuratively* Utopian (as Jameson proposes above) by a large stretch of the imagination<sup>7</sup>. In *Blade Runner* these contradictory responses to the Replicants would then seem to speak about an ambivalent or even paradoxical response to both a slave or working class, and the forces of technoscience, reification or private reason signified by technology. On the one hand a xenophobia towards a now other-worldly working class (Oriental labour in the Far East and South East Asia) and a Romantic technophobia, while on the other a reconciliation of classes, and a Utopian or Marxian redemption of humanity and the human body through technology.

This last fantasy is exemplified by Batty's final and ironic victory over Deckard. Even as his last life ebbs out of him, he proves his physical and moral superiority over his mediocre victim. He embodies the recurring fantasy of acquiring eternal or prolonged life through biological or medical knowledge, breeding and medical intervention being the modes of application orientated towards this

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care system trailing behind privatised health etc. I will discuss this more fully when looking at the medico-pharmaceutical nexus in *Johnny Mnemonic*.

<sup>6</sup> Depending on the version, Rachel is either an exceptional Replicant (after all she has no expiry date) and allowed to stay, or in the more sinister Director's Cut she remains Deckard's plaything for a little while longer (and here she is reduced again to being the means to an end, and not a purpose 'in itself').

<sup>7</sup> Jameson points out how in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Adorno and Horkheimer read a Utopian thread in racism, how "...antisemitism, is shown to be profoundly Utopian in character, as a form of cultural envy which is at the same time a repressed recognition of the Utopian impulse" (*Political Unconscious* 288).



end. Batty's struggle for immortality can be read as indicated above, as a masked Utopian end-of-history impulse, a grasp at Kant's "realm of ends" or Marx's "realm of Freedom"- but his whole performance also has a distinctly elitist flavour. That Batty comes so close to finding the key to his survival (he meets his maker, Tyrell) is an ironic perversity which hints at the form of tragedy - the tragic hero usually has a minor but fatal flaw, and he is certainly 'fitter' to live than Deckard, in both respects. In fact his physiological prowess is amplified by the Aryan phenomenon Rutger Hauer running around bare-chested displaying an athletic torso; this combined with the very concept of biological engineering (not to mention the *film noir* coding) are supposed to evoke the racial Utopianism of the Third Reich, and possibly further even back, Nietzsche's "overman". But of course what the association of Nazism and Nietzsche is largely premised on is the former's literalisation of Nietzsche's metaphorical imperative to 'breed a higher type', eventually into the 'overman', often translated as 'superman'. The purpose and ultimate justification of society was to produce genius, superior beings who stood out from mediocrity and the norm. This 'breeding' was not racial or biological in any way, but engineered through education<sup>8</sup>. The term 'higher' did not refer to social class dependent on economic standing, or any belief in the inherent value of the aristocracy; as David Cooper observes "Nietzsche's 'aristocracy' is one of the spirit, not of land or industry" (*Authenticity and Learning: Nietzsche's Educational Philosophy* 119). Neither was 'type' meant to signify the uniformed automata that the SS factory floor produced from some fantasy prototype, but an individual able to think and make judgements for himself outside the limits of a restraining morality (in this sense Nietzsche's vision is a radicalisation of Kant's individual's journey of enlightenment, who comes to consciousness in morality). In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche tells us what to look forward to:

Towards *new philosophers* ...; spirits strong and original enough to make a start on antithetical evaluations and to revalue and reverse 'eternal values'; towards heralds and forerunners, towards men of the future who in the present knot together the constraint which compels the will of millennia on to new paths. To teach man the future of man as his will, as dependent on a human will, and to prepare for great enterprises and collective experiments in discipline and breeding so as to make an end of that gruesome dominion of chance and nonsense that has been called 'history' - the nonsense of the 'greatest number' is only its latest form: for that a new kind of philosopher and commander will sometime be needed, in face of whom whatever has existed on earth of hidden, dreadful and benevolent spirits may well look pale and dwarfed (126).

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<sup>8</sup> As David Cooper points out in a footnote on Nietzsche's vocabulary "it should be clear ...that by 'breeding' Nietzsche is not referring to a programme of eugenics- though he did expect cultural advance to come from greater racial mixing. There are no passages where the eugenic interpretation is required, and many where it would be impossible, as when he writes 'There is need of a doctrine strong enough to have the effect of "breeding" '" (*Authenticity and Learning: Nietzsche's Educational Philosophy* 155)

A Nietzschean reading of this struggle of humans contra Replicants would then situate Roy Batty as one such superior being, “a new philosopher” tending towards “overman”, whose will to power knows no internal limits. Batty and his ilk, in their exceptionality or superiority over the norm, present a fundamental threat to the dominant utilitarian (whether liberal or socialist) ideology, ideals such as ‘the greatest number’, ‘equality’, mediocrity etc., and to the perpetuation of these as ‘eternal values’. These “overmen” have to be eradicated, individually and collectively, for the logic of ‘the herd’ to prevail, for radical difference of ability or aptitude to be erased and negated. This would obviously not be a surface logic in the text, in other words an explicit reason for ‘retirement’ of Replicants, but rather a subterranean ‘democratic’ will at work in the ideological deep-structure of the narrative, working in the interests of the majority and justifying itself (it would need to legitimate itself) by marking the superior ‘other’ with the irrefutable paint of ‘Nazism’. Nietzsche is himself aware of the possibility of the annihilation of the minority who transcend the masses or the herd. He warns against the prevailing situation “today, conversely, when the herd animal alone obtains and bestows honours in Europe, when ‘equality of rights could all too easily change into equality in wrongdoing: I mean into a general war on everything rare, strange, privileged, the higher man, the higher soul, the higher duty, the higher responsibility, creative fullness of power and mastery” (*Beyond Good and Evil* 144).

### **The Iron Grip of Private Reason**

The alienation of reason, from all the other activities of man, changed reason from an activity to a mechanism, and society from a human process to a machine”- Raymond Williams’, *Modern Tragedy*, p. 72

Kant stands at the dawn of modern philosophy, writing at and as the culmination of the Enlightenment - and yet he also has a significant position in the emergence of the matrix of distinctly modern object-orientated language of control, the network of medical, psychological, juridical, and human science discourses that Foucault collects under the umbrella term of “power-knowledge”. If the *Critiques* are read as initiating the tangent of philosophical discourse known as phenomenology, the *Philosophy of Law* makes a significant contribution to modern and Enlightenment legal and political science. Although ‘Kant’, the author, is still the unifying mechanism by which these different genres and foci are held together, he is paradoxically one of the first modern thinkers to envisage and promote the specialization and fragmentation of the all-encompassing field of philosophy into separate and locally legislated realms. One of his philosophical axioms, and a principle which gets applied consistently at the levels of both content and form, is that of heterogeneity: different objects of philosophical knowledge involve different mental processes, which each operate on a different set of ground rules and principles; these in turn require different discursive spheres.

In fact his architectonic of reason, which involves the division of the subject's mind into the independently legislated faculties of willing, knowing, and aesthetic experience, contributes to the more general modernist project of constructing a framework for the distribution and authorisation of specialised knowledges, an economy of divided knowledge still at work in the modern university. But, coextensive with this emphasis on difference, is a belief in sameness. The different tangents and discourses of modernity are, for Kant, held together by the goal of modernity rather than an omniscient subject: the evolution of a new type of subjectivity which goes by the name of maturity, enlightenment, autonomy. Jurgen Habermas suggests this is the original vision behind the whole collective programme of Enlightenment, let alone just Kant's unifying principle. "The Enlightenment philosophers wanted to utilize this accumulation of specialized culture for the enrichment of everyday life - that is for the rational organisation of everyday social life" ('Modernity - An Incomplete Project' 9). Specialisation was meant to yield progress or development of knowledge in accessible, practical ways for ordinary people. Ironically the reverse process was put into gear -- the fragmentation of cultural production into autonomous and conflicting spheres<sup>9</sup>.

Turning to Kant, I want to follow this pedagogical theme and look at his developmental or diachronic theory of autonomy and maturity after having examined the more ahistorical or synchronic analyses of the *phenomena-noumena* dualism and moral freedom one finds in the *Critiques* and The 'Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals'. In his essay on the nature of Enlightenment we find Kant writing on and within the narrative theme/scheme which haunts his philosophical *system*. Rearranging Lyotard slightly, who sees Enlightenment scientific philosophy first constituting itself and then validating itself by grafting itself onto a powerful legitimating narrative of emancipation, I argue that Kant's system or synchronic thought appears inextricably bound up with the narrative.

The goal of autonomy can be analyzed into the two interconnected components of 'subject' and 'predicate', the paradigm or 'subject' of the autonomous subject as a frozen perceptual and cognitive structure at any given point of time, or at least its *life-time*, and the 'predicate' of progress, teleological evolution, the temporal life-process of becoming. Kant is concerned with both of these perspectives on subjectivity as autonomy, but tends to focus on one aspect at a time. One gets a sense of these central preoccupations or philosophical motifs from the essay 'An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?', although here he puts more emphasis on process (or history) than mental state (or psychology). The first line of his essay gives us the answer to the question posed in the title: "Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage [sometimes translated as immaturity].

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<sup>9</sup> But whether it was for the mythical subject of 'the people' or the literal individual subject Enlightenment also meant a new consciousness of time or temporality which saw a radical break with a static, ahistorical past. Philosophical or cultural modernity (as opposed to economic modernization) emanating from the Enlightenment period is the process of the subject evolving into or becoming something: for Kant the individual moves towards a free, moral subjectivity; for Marx the multicellular subject of the sleeping proletariat is awakened; for Nietzsche, the stronger 'overman' emerges out of nihilism, or the loss of the value of values.

Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another" ("What is Enlightenment?" 30). Although his essay confronts a sense of what has most recently been identified as 'power-knowledge', in Foucault's later work (*Discipline and Punish* [1977]), it is nearer to (both historically and ideologically) and perhaps prototypical of what Marx discerned as 'ideology' and the 'superstructural' dimension; essentially it attempts to constitute and address the same problematic, the nexus of politics, education, and governance. 'Independence', 'majority' and 'guardians' are words he initially uses to describe the diachronic aspect of Enlightenment, and suggest the metaphor of the individual's development towards maturity; however this is just one of three pejorative metaphors - and probably the most positive one - that he manages to pack into his short monograph of only a few pages.

For Kant the most part of humanity living in the society of his time were trapped in a state of near imbecility. This was in part due to the power of the supervisory strata, the polity or political classes that order and guide the social body, and here Kant makes a precocious analysis of the power relations inherent in the relationship between civil and political society, but he also blames the mental inertia of the public itself. People are actually satisfied or content being told what to think and do. The philosopher doesn't mince his words, claiming "laziness and cowardice are the reasons why so great a portion of mankind ...remain under lifelong tutelage" ("What is Enlightenment?" 30). He returns, a bit further into his essay, with an indictment of revolutionary faith in instant enlightenment, arguing that the general change in consciousness can only be achieved gradually. In warning against the merely cosmetic changes of a post-revolutionary government which still operates *for* the people, Kant evokes a lack of reason and awareness that characterises the general populace: "new prejudices will serve as well as old ones to harness the great thoughtless masses" (p.31). The "great thoughtless masses" is a representation of the absence of consciousness which will shape continental philosophy for a while to come, transmitted to Hegel and Marx, for whom the slave or bondsman is still to come into consciousness of himself, to Nietzsche who sees willed blindness and sheep-mentality on the part of the public. One could well develop an argument that this sign or designation seems to provide the enunciative or discursive subject-position of 'the philosopher of Modernity' with a sense of personal 'identity', both diachronically (in the lineage of a philosophical tradition) and in its synchronic or social relation to the public or the reading audience.

Although Kant goes to great pains to point out that there is no quick transition between pre-enlightenment and post-enlightenment, that enlightenment is an evolutionary as opposed to revolutionary process, it doesn't follow, as it could, that there are therefore no distinctly unenlightened people. In fact this is a rather strange inconsistency in Kant's argument. The fact that the "the public can only slowly attain enlightenment" would seem to indicate there is no definite borderline between enlightenment and the consciousness that precedes it, but Kant's various analogies indicate a quite distinct and inferior mental space. The metaphors of "maturity" and "guardians" all point to an analogy

not directly mentioned or invoked : the implicit figure of the average person (the public) as juvenile, child, or perhaps even infant. This difference is one still marked out within the boundaries of the human, in which the adult or teacher is opposed to the child. However Kant continues with his figuration, developing this difference and taking it outside these anthropomorphisms and the realm of human differences. The second metaphor explicitly draws a comparison between the relation between man and his guardians and the relationship between man and domesticated animals, 'thoughtless' creatures of burden. "After the guardians have first made their domestic cattle dumb and have made sure these placid creatures will not dare take a single step without the harness of the cart to which they are tethered, the guardians then show them the danger which threatens them if they try to go alone" ('What is Enlightenment?' 30). Here the lack of where a linguistic faculty should be is doubly emphasised in a tautology: cattle, already without language, are deprived it (again) in the adjective "dumb". The image of the "harness" in the above analogy is repeated and developed in the assertion that "new prejudices will serve as old ones to harness the great thoughtless masses" (31), and connects with an accompaniment of related metaphors: "the yoke of tutelage" and "fetters of an everlasting tutelage" serve to signal connotations of exploitation, entrapment, even enslavement.

This rhetorical surplus of figurality appears to be a compensation for an aporia in the discourse; it is paradoxically symptomatic of the failure to represent what is not enlightenment, or what enlightenment is not; that is, its Other, the 'now', the 'present' of Kant's society. He is much more at ease describing the supersensible future state and State, or where it is that a developing history is heading, than the sensible present, or what it is coming from. As we see only near the end of his essay, "tutelage" as the other of "enlightenment" is actually a euphemistic metaphor for the darker and far more nebulous concept of "barbarism": he warns that "Men work themselves gradually out of barbarity if only intentional artifices are not made to hold them in it" (p.34), suggesting that this anthropological term might be appropriate for the eighteenth century European nation-state. What is it that Kant cannot describe, and why can't he present it? The complexity of the 'object' of his analysis, the difficulty it poses for his brand of philosophical discourse in relation to the more adapted or evolved vocabularies of Marx and Foucault, has already been mentioned, and it is only retrospectively via these developments that one can appreciate his stretching of a still unspecialised language to its limits. Perhaps another reason for this avoidance behaviour, or what we could specify as the repression of the present, is the negative affect of the real. The logic of this repression: a sublime horror at the incipient sense of an actual and institutional history of domination which cannot be adequately represented (neither quantitatively in its totality and complexity, nor qualitatively in its degradation and bestiality) is to be avoided if possible. What I am suggesting is that there is repression or obfuscation alongside presentation; the metaphors speak about an evil and horror, and yet -- in the figural mutation, a process fueled by a sense of their insufficiency -- at the same time testify to its unspeakability. Embedded in this affirmation of a future Enlightened consciousness there is a negation of the present,

even though Kant feels obliged to applaud the gestures of his relatively liberal monarch, Frederick. Of course the truth does out, but, like in all good stories, only in the last line (as we shall see shortly).

Having discussed two of the metaphors that Kant deploys to represent and repress the other of an enlightened humanity, it remains to discern the last and most important one. The final analogy deployed to describe the “masses” or docile public is one that, like that of “cattle”, takes us out of the boundary of the human, and poses the machine as the other to the human. Although this sign only emerges in its naked and shocking materiality in the denouement of the story, one can discern its manifestation in less obvious garb. In the course of the essay this metaphor of the human machine is reached in a rather roundabout way, its first faint apparition occurring where Kant goes about discussing the various necessary obstacles and restraints on the vector of progress and enlightenment. The complete and immediate withdrawal and absence of social and discursive regulation would lead to anarchy and the failure of freedom, and Kant suggests that “the public can only slowly attain enlightenment” (‘What is Enlightenment?’ 31). What is for Kant undeniably and non-negotiably necessary in most social and economic institutions is a “certain mechanism” (31) of power distribution, a certain disrespect for the individual’s subjective freedom and will, which enables the smooth functioning of that organisation or system. He makes a distinction between what he calls ‘public’ and ‘private’ uses of reason to justify the continued use of social control and prescriptive authority as a handbrake on personal freedom. ‘Private use of reason’ is that use which a person is required to employ or obey in his or her specific position within a hierarchical or unequalitarian situation, what he describes as a ‘passive’ use of reason. According to Kant “private use I call that which one may make use of it in a particular civil post or office which is entrusted to him” (‘What is Enlightenment?’ 31). As soldier, teacher, bureaucrat, preacher, or even taxpayer (these are Kant’s examples) one cannot challenge one’s obligation when duty calls; one has to deliver, act or obey. Although the citizen is still bound (in the nation-state of enlightenment) to obey the prescriptive phrases that come his way in his official and specific capacity within an institution (embedded within a socio-economic order), he can nevertheless look to a public domain of free expression in order to voice his dissent or criticisms. This open and totally free zone of ideological traffic, open to one outside of one’s immediate economic function, is what Kant calls ‘public reason’, and here the use of reason is not “passive” but active. “By the public use of one’s reason I understand the use which a person makes of it before the reading public” (31). So one can write freely in leisure-time, outside of the work place, but one cannot disobey a superior authority, deny, challenge or reject a duty or obligation or command in a ‘run-time’ situation. Hence the slogan “Argue as much as you will, and about what you will, but obey!” (31).

But if we look a little closer at this stereoscopic image of the “mechanism” the figure of the android jumps out at us in a surprising and subtle modulation of tone, so subtle that one might not detect it at a first glance. In justifying the private abuse of reason in institutional spaces he argues, as we have seen, for the necessity of a “mechanism”: “many affairs which are conducted in the interest of

the community require a certain mechanism through which some members of the community must passively conduct themselves with an artificial unanimity, through which the government may direct them to public ends, or at least prevent them from destroying those ends" ('What is Enlightenment?' 31). At this point the word "mechanism" seems to refer to a power relation, in which the normally active subject temporarily submits to an "artificial" role or function imposed by a higher authority. David Owens gives us a literal interpretation of this definition, saying "within a civic post, it appears, the individual must be conceived simply as an *instrument* for the achievement of public goals" (*Maturity & Modernity* 9). However in the second-next sentence of Kant's text, the meaning of "mechanism" modulates into quite a new, ambiguous and sinister significance.

But so far as a *part of the mechanism* regards *himself* at the same time as a member of the whole community or of a society of world citizens, and thus in the role of a scholar who addresses the public (in the proper sense of the word) through his writings, he certainly can argue without hurting the affairs of which he is in part responsible as a passive member. [my emphasis] ('What is Enlightenment?' 31)

In a rather startling about face Kant refers to the *whole* of the social subject as a "part of the mechanism", of which a 'sub-part' manages to see itself as global citizen or "member of the whole community". We would expect it to be the other way around, the whole human being who submits a part of himself to a certain mechanistic functionality (this is consistent with the explicit logic of capitalism: one sells one's labour as a commodity, so many hours per day, in which time one is obliged to go through the appropriate motions regulated by pre-specified codes - being part of a mechanism isn't normally seen to extend to recreational or home time). One could interpret the qualification "at the same time", as it is clear a certain part of Kant intended, as splitting the subject down the middle, symmetrically and simultaneously, into symbiotic and equal partners, a passive and an active subject. This would be quite a neat bisection; in which a part of the "part of the mechanism" cohabits peacefully with the "citizen of the world" in the same body. But what is striking and of course sinister is the way in which the grammatical structure of the sentence momentarily weights this apparent balance or happy marriage. The subject of the sentence is the cog in the machine, the "part of the mechanism", the subject already there, who manifests or conjures up another self out of itself, a surplus self, an emancipated serf - later and lesser, the predicate *derived*, just like Eve. The primary existence of the subject as mechanical part is unassailably asserted and presented by the sentence, yet in relative contrast a Cartesian cloud of doubt or uncertainty hangs over the presence of the identity dreamed into existence by that uncertain verb "regards", a word which suggests appearance as opposed to reality or essence: 'it regards himself as such, but we know otherwise'.

What does this suggest about the way in which Kant perceives the modern subject? Obviously, as I have pointed out, the demands of his conscious philosophical architectonic require symmetry, equality, a give and take with regard to the sovereignty of the human will. However, another image

appears within a rupture or hiatus in the continuity of his exposition, a representation possibly not intended surfaces, a picture of a machinic subjectivity which only *imagines* or “regards” itself to be free, and to be driven by its own will, and respecting the respective wills of a community of other free subjects. Kant, the author, might well deny this as his intention, and this would still be consistent with the above interpretation: it rests precisely on the principle that there the author does not have full and consistent control of the meaning which he appears to produce, and that it is quite possible that meanings and images antithetical to his intended logico-philosophical enterprise manifest themselves. As David Simpson points out in his introduction to the essay:

Much of what Kant says here marks him out as a man of the Enlightenment rather than as a Romantic, though any extreme version of this historian’s dichotomy must inhibit our understanding of the period. Here, the emphasis on the possibility of clear and rational thinking and its salutary effects on society at large is presented with only hints of the darker forces working to complicate the establishment or dissemination of truth. Or perhaps we should say [...] that the negative effects are recognized in the argument at the same time as a faith in the possibility of their disappearance is preserved (*German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism* 29).

It is precisely these “hints of the darker forces” that I have been trying to finesse from the text. Wherever there is assertion there must - even if simply from a linguistic point of view - also be negation, and there can be moments within a logical vector or trajectory when this suppression presents itself. As we shall see, the whole system of Kant’s philosophy is embedded in and concretises the grounds for human freedom; it simultaneously asserts and constructs or develops the principles which *govern* or *enable* - and there lies the ambiguity- the thinking of an autonomous human subject. The image or representation denied or repressed by such a conception is what has rather rhetorically been called the spectral metaphor of the machine, in this case a human machine which in its enslavement is the inverse of the free subject, and which is just a “part of the mechanism”, a cog in a larger conspiring and dominating machine as opposed to a community of free wills or a “kingdom of ends”.

It is only in the last sentence of Kant’s monograph on enlightenment that this ghostly image of the human-machine appears in its full horror. The apparition appears in order to do the work of scaring us out of the darkness of myth and into the light, to enable “the escape of men from their self-incurred tutelage” (‘What is Enlightenment?’, 34), and in his final paragraph Kant suggests that the enlightened ruler “is not afraid of shadows” (35). Kant has been hard at work trying to convince the reader of the rather conservative notion that the freedom of the mind increases in inverse proportion to the civil liberties respected by the state, i.e. that all a country needs is, in David Owens’ words, “a few enlightened individuals and freedom of public debate” (*Maturity and Modernity* 8). A disciplined and firmly governed society fosters enlightenment, and a more libertarian dispensation (and here he would appear to be gesturing towards the French revolutionary state) actually impedes the enlightenment of



individuals. His final sentence is thus a declaration of faith in the climate of intellectual tolerance established by Frederick II in Prussia, and a slow steady movement towards an enlightened age. What is here finally revealed is the true essence of the contemporary public, who have already been pejoratively compared to domesticated animals:

As nature has uncovered from under this hard shell the seed for which she most tenderly cares - the propensity and vocation to free thinking - this gradually works back upon the character of the people, who thereby gradually become capable of managing freedom; finally, it affects the principles of government, which finds it to its advantage to treat men, *who are now more than machines*, in accordance with their dignity (my emphasis). (34)

What is strikingly evident is that Kant is in no hurry to speed up the process of enlightenment. It is only when a dialectical movement of enlightenment - the interplay between the free intellectual thought of an elite and the incremental development of the masses - has reached a stage of maturity in which the public is *ready* that the powers that be can really begin to consider conferring a properly human status on all. Men can only be treated according to their “dignity”, that is their moral freedom, when they *have* it. The “hard shell” of animal-like immaturity is not cracked, but slowly weathered away, and the inner seed of freedom “uncovered”. Although there is perhaps a degree of irony or equivocation about his description, Kant implies that if the public of a future utopian state are “*now more than machines* (my emphasis)” then people that constitute the masses in his time, a time he has already hinted at as “barbarity”, are now, at present, *no* “more than machines”, without and undeserving of dignity and human rights. This is a fairly negative interpretation or rather one which denies that Kant says exclusively what he wants to say. Alongside the explicit appeal for the extension of the domain of freedom is a more reticent retentiveness which wants to keep freedom as an end, an esoteric goal attained by few.

One could, on the other hand, argue that his characterisation of the general public or masses as “machines” is dripping with verbal irony, and that his rhetoric is intended to highlight the absolute depravity, inhumanity and absurdity of the instrumental reason employed by the state. Obviously Kant does not really intend it in any kind of absolute literal sense; there is a sense of a degree of irony or humorous play in his deployment of this obviously extreme opposition to the human; but in irony there is also always a sense of resigned acceptance. This is the sense of a lack of empathy, an inability or unwillingness to identify with what is seen as not yet properly human, an intellectual snobbery. And when considering the general rhetorical context of the metaphor, what has already been interpreted as a defense of the authoritarian Prussian state of 1790 (whose attitudes and strategies were presumably being questioned or least compared to the radical events in France) it becomes clear that Kant is questioning the maturity and readiness of the public to assume full powers of citizenship. The escape from tutelage is then a process which takes time and has to be worked at; the masses shouldn’t expect to be treated like humans until they can think for themselves, as humans do. Enlightenment then is

essentially a process of becoming human, discovering one's own and others' humanity - until then one is an animal or a machine. The table below illustrates the oppositions that underlie the elaboration of Kant's views on the development of consciousness and Reason.

present	utopian future
child minor	adult, teacher, majority, guardians
animals\ cattle	guardians
mechanism (private reason)	scholar (public reason)
barbarity	enlightened age
machine\masses	men\ humanity

If this is the way in which Kant sees the evolution and spread of the individual consciousness towards humanity and maturity, what does it indicate about his conception of modernity and history more generally? Modernity is the historical stage which makes the goal of maturity possible, and as such is a time of transition which holds the promise of a future humanity within it, in which the human recreates itself anew in a more human image. Although he admits that he does not live in an *enlightened age*, he nevertheless maintains that the contemporary age was “an age of *enlightenment*”(33), in which there is limited yet gradually increasing freedom. Machines will become men, private reason will shrink to minimum as public reason grows in strength, the power relation between an infantile populace and its guardians will disappear as all reach the age or stage of majority. In modernity civil society emerges out of political society, which in turn becomes less significant. This historico-teleological theory and its motifs proves to be extremely influential, providing the conceptual and thematic framework with which a number of later historical critiques (from Hegel and Marx to Foucault) orientate themselves, or at least against which they position themselves. As I have mentioned, Kant's inability to represent - or his avoidance of - the present indicates a repression; it is achieved through a metonymic shorthand, in which various metaphors are substituted to avoid the difficult work of addressing the sublime totality of power, instrumental reason, and domination operating in modern society. He admits it is there, but *omits* digging any deeper, expressing faith that it will soon disappear anyway. The totality and power structure of the historical present is addressed more directly by the philosophers that follow in his footsteps. Marx takes Hegel's treatment of the master-slave relationship and its dialectical narrative of emancipation<sup>10</sup> and turns it on its head, telling a story of a slave-class becoming conscious of itself and

<sup>10</sup>In his magnum opus, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel offers the strange, metaphorical analysis of a mental conflict between different modes of consciousness which constitutes the principle of all servitudes:

“The one is independent, and its essential nature is to be for itself; the other is dependent, and its essence is life or existence for another. The former is the Master, or Lord, the latter the Bondsmen. The master is the consciousness that exists *for itself*; but no longer merely the general notion of existence for self. Rather, it is a consciousness existing on its own account which is mediated with itself through an other

freeing itself from its enslavement as “part of the mechanism”. This is all still within the narrative paradigm of ‘maturity’, the process of becoming more than just a machine.

Returning to the figure of the Replicants in *Blade Runner*, it doesn’t take much to realise that they, in a strange inversion of Kant’s dualism of *phenomenon* versus *noumenon*, are the community that best represent the ‘kingdom of ends’ - and that humanity, metonymically represented by the killing machine, Deckard (but also the teeming, anonymous, sublime amalgamation of populations of Los Angeles) represent the phenomenal world of mechanical cause and effect. Indeed the multiple ethnicities, the various animal species that make cameo appearances, the sex shows, all that we see of human life, provide a sleazy but distinctly biological flavour, a world of genetic determinisms. The Replicants are humanoid in form yet are biologically constructed robot-workers constructed for specific purposes, Pris as a pleasure worker, Batty as a soldier, etc. However they refuse these ends or purposes, and embark on an archetypal quest for the transcendental human purpose of freedom, of being as an end in itself. They commence the journey of enlightenment, a process of emancipation from what Kant calls “self-incurred tutelage” towards autonomy of the will, although as machines the “tutelage” comes already programmed<sup>11</sup>. In rejecting their respective specialised functions they reject the reifying force that is described above as ‘private reason’ and they assert Kant’s conviction that “every rational being exists as end in himself and not merely as a means to be used by this or that will” (‘Foundations of a Metaphysics of Morals’ 86). They seek Kant’s redemption in the search for his human essence of being (and being recognized as) a pure ‘purpose’ or an ‘end in itself’ and of having (which amounts to being recognised as having) inherent, immeasurable value - they seek nothing more than an extension of their limited lifespans; human life itself, albeit their own (and it is nevertheless a recognition of value), exists as their purpose.

On a more simplistic level it is the Replicants who are the only social or communal creatures in the human world, exhibiting empathy and feeling for each other and living far closer to the moral law of enlightened humanity than the isolated and alienated human individuals. I disagree with Philip Strick who in ‘Philip K. Dick and the Movies’ argues that “contrary to Asimov’s well-ordered universe, the chaotic opportunism of the 21st century has provided for no moralistic implant in android programming; these [Replicants] are all creatures without conscience, guilt or fear. And as they begin

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consciousness, i.e. through an other whose very nature implies that it is bound up with an independent being or with thinghood in general [ . . . ] In all this, the unessential consciousness is, for the master, the object which embodies the truth of his certainty of himself. But it is evident that this object does not correspond to its notion; for, just where the master has effectively achieved lordship, he really finds that something has come about quite different from an independent consciousness. It is not an independent , but rather a dependent consciousness that he has achieved. He is thus not assured of self-existence as his truth; he finds that his truth is rather the unessential consciousness [ . . . ] The truth of the independent consciousness is accordingly the consciousness of the bondsman” (Hegel, pp. 234 - 237).

<sup>11</sup> Here it is appropriate to speculate on some of the resonances of the name “Replicant”. While the reptile or snake is a figure with its own density of meaning in the story, what is relevant at this juncture is the other half of the compound, namely ‘applicant’: importantly our first introduction to the Replicants involves a situation which looks like a job interview, but then it becomes obvious that the Replicant is, via the test, applying for the status of ‘human’, and that more generally speaking the replicants are simply applicants.

to wear out, they sometimes go berserk and have to be destroyed” (16). On the contrary, they have a rational purpose, and seem to share a deep empathetic understanding of each other. Tyrell, Sebastian, and Deckard are all single males, lonely and unhappy, in the leisure time merely alienated parts of different social mechanisms. To alleviate his loneliness Sebastian surrounds himself with a collection of synthetic ‘friends’, dwarf-sized humanoid toys (who eventually *do* run amok, creating a bit of social disturbance by throwing garbage around!). While the only emotions that the hard-boiled Deckard (or perhaps Harrison Ford) can dredge up are a watery melancholic nostalgia at the piano, and a bit of petty cruelty towards Rachel, when he enjoys watching her identity crumble as he reveals to her that she is in fact a Replicant. Replicants touch each other with mammalian warmth, while Sebastian and Tyrell play a long-distance game of chess. The Replicants operate as equals, whereas the humans are enmeshed in power relations and hierarchical systems whether it be Sebastian’s domestic politics, Deckard’s police force or Tyrell’s corporation<sup>12</sup>. This latter triumvirate is not partially situated (as Kant would have it) but wholly embroiled in Kant’s mechanism of “private reason”. In terms of this last social vector, the three bachelors represent - in their spheres of influence, science (Sebastian), commerce (Tyrell) and political society (Deckard) - the final victory of reification or cognitive-instrumental reason over the value spheres of aesthetics and ethics. Habermas has pointed to this perception, showing how the various cultural spheres emerge as independent and autonomous domains of reason with the beginning of cultural modernity and social modernization, replacing the unified metaphysical and Christian world-view. According to Habermas the history of Reason in modernity has seen one dimension come to the fore, cognitive-instrumental reason, which has been cultivated through the manipulations of capitalism and rationalisation: ironically the

communicative potential of reason first had to be released into the patterns of modern lifeworlds before the unfettered imperatives of the economic and administrative sub-systems could react back on the vulnerable practice of everyday life and could thereby promote the cognitive-instrumental dimension to domination over the suppressed moments of practical reason. The communicative potential of reason has been both developed and distorted in the course of modernization (*Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* 315).

“Cognitive-instrumental reason”, a structure of rationality based on knowledge and mastery via subject-object relations, thus comes to colonise and strangle the other rationalities: “moral-practical” reason, as discerned by Kant, and predicated on intersubjective relations (normative evaluations and expectations, prescriptions, laws) as well as “aesthetic -expressive” reason, which involves the subject’s expression and relation to inner experience.

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<sup>12</sup> In this Romantic difference, they are nostalgic phantoms of the imaginary loss of more primitive bonds of a primal, egalitarian community, ‘lost’ in the move to a rationalised and alienating *Gesellschaft*.

## CHAPTER TWO: MODERNITY CONTINUED - 'THE PRISON OF THE BODY'

### Marx (subject subjected)

For Marx and mainstream Marxist theory the Kantian faith in the developmental processes of cultural enlightenment and an improving humanity corresponding to modernization and capitalist growth was another beguiling and mystifying myth. The roles of the emancipation drama have to be given to the real subjects of history, the antagonistic classes that emerge in every mode of production. The emerging logic of modernity as a time of change is not Kant's "public reason" but a warped, instrumental reason which reduces men to things and elevates things to subjects. While offering unprecedented potential for the final liberation of humanity, modernity is simultaneously a time of degradation and privation, of the loss of the most basic human essences. Rather than moving away from a life as animals or machines, modernity means, for the majority of people, a regression back to a form of existence even lower than that of *animals*. "A dwelling in the *light*, which Prometheus describes in Aeschylus as one of the great gifts through which he transformed savages into men, ceases to exist for the worker. Light, air, etc. - the simplest animal cleanliness - ceases to be a need for man. *Dirt* - this pollution and putrefaction of man, the *sewage* (this word is to be understood in its literal sense) of civilization - becomes an element of life for him" (*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* 359). The central 'contradiction' within a capitalist trajectory is both moral outrage and absurdity, as well as an unreformable economic and structural paradox: the more the capitalists accumulate capital, the more impoverished becomes the working class. This central contradiction of capitalism or modernity can only be resolved by revolution.

Marx confronts the tradition of Enlightenment and its preoccupation with consciousness, intellectual thought and emancipation and turns it on its head. Exploding the unity of the concept of consciousness he redirects attention to the conveniently forgotten mental state of real human experience as he saw it, an experience for the most part of humanity embedded in the most atrocious conditions. Under the shattered rubric of consciousness Marx establishes the counter-consciousness of the proletariat - a different if not antithetical mode of consciousness, a space of alienation and suffering, to counteract what he saw as a totalising bourgeois illusion of the whole of humanity in the idea of the 'essence' of man. In Marx and Engels' *The German Ideology* this is discerned in the criticism of the philosophy of Feuerbach:

Like our opponents, Feuerbach still accepts and at the same misunderstands existing reality. We recall the passage in the *Philosophy of the Future*, where he develops the view that the existence of a thing or a man is at the same time its or his essence, that the conditions of existence, the mode of life and particular activity of an animal or human individual are those, in which its "essence" feels itself satisfied. Here every exception is expressly conceived as unhappy chance, as an abnormality which cannot be altered. Thus

if millions of proletarians feel themselves by no means contented in their conditions of life, if their existence is in contradiction with their “essence”, then it is certainly an abnormality, but not an unhappy chance (*German Ideology* 34)

The incongruity of a concept of a generally fulfilled human essence with the facts of the living conditions of a large sector of the industrialised population is pointed out. The main point asserted here is that this kind of thinking denies the very real differences of class realities and experiences, and is not able to see that social reality needs to be transformed if it does not satisfy a large sector of the population. But, even if as a side-effect, the logic employed by Marx and Engels also brings into question (or at least into focus) the rhetorical nature of the ontological category of “essence”, a foregrounding achieved by the isolation of the word in quotation marks.<sup>13</sup> This destabilisation of the meaning and value of the concept “essence” is one which proves problematic for the materialist approach. On the one hand “human essence” demands to be negated by a historical logic of material production, yet on the other hand it is also the ethical principle to which the discourse appeals. There is an unarticulated conflict here over what to do with the category of “essence”. To reject it would be commensurate with some of the positions taken in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, where he produces a supplement of contradictory negative experience, which cannot be contained by the initial clause: “It [capital] produces intelligence, but it produces idiocy and cretinism for the worker” (327). Here the emphasis is on the constructedness of human consciousness, a stratification of experience built by history. The other of consciousness or experience is not so much an “essence” which needs to be found or rediscovered as the repressed other of bourgeois consciousness: proletarian pre-consciousness. On the other hand he also wants to retain a sense of essence, a trace of communality and freedom that is still there, struggling in the day-to-day “abnormality” of industrial capitalism.

Marx offers an analysis that, in rejecting an existing essential and common humanity, proposes a modernity in which two conflicting essences are at work against (and for) each other. The working class has an essence or soul fundamentally opposed to that of the middle-class. One can see the Hegelian dialectic, a linguistic or semiotic technique, at work in the representation of this other, as is revealed in *The Holy Family*: “Proletariat and Wealth are opposites. As such they form a whole [. . .] Private property as private property, as wealth, is forced to maintain its own existence and thereby the existence of its opposite, the proletariat. It is the positive side of the opposition, private property satisfied in itself.” (quoted in Introduction to *German Ideology* xiii) and the Proletariat equals the “negative side”. The Proletariat has as its essence a ghostly essence, a lack or negativity of essence, alienation. All the differences (of sub-classes, of pain, pleasure and others) within a “whole” of society, as well as those without, are silenced or subsumed by the deployment of the totalising category of the

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<sup>13</sup> He continues this metaphysical witchhunt of Feuerbach a little further on, again foregrounding the archaic language of “essences: “To push these aside he must take refuge in a double perception, a profane one which only perceives the “flatly obvious” and a higher more philosophical one which perceives the “true essence” of things” (*German Ideology* 35).

Proletariat, which has its supposed essence or core, some metaphysical or external principle of negativity. This mythologisation reappears in a discussion of political economy: “the whole of human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production” (*Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts* 333), which allows for “universal human emancipation” through the liberation of the proletariat<sup>14</sup>. At this point Marx’s logic sounds very much like the multi-dimensional textuality analysed in *Blade Runner*, as either Enlightenment or a deeper emancipation myth. The class struggle signifies a greater struggle, that of all servitudes in history (as the ‘Communist Manifesto’ recounts “freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman - in a word oppressor and oppressed”). As we shall see a bit further on, Jameson accounts for this redemption theme of a ‘tragic’ Marxism in his analysis of the final interpretative frame, ‘the ideology of form’. If we add to this the contradiction mentioned above between bourgeois “intelligence” and proletarian “idiocy and cretinism” a schema both similar and different to that of Kant’s begins to emerge. Add Marx’s appropriation of Hegel’s subject’s struggle to consciousness and we have the semiotic system tabled below:

Proletariat \ Labour	Bourgeoisie \ Capital
Unconsciousness, pain, suffering	Consciousness
Work and animal pastimes	Pleasure
Cretinism	Intelligence
Body \ Animal \ Machine	Mind \ Human

Kant’s Enlightenment		Marx’s capitalism	
“masses”	“guardians”	working class	bourgeoisie
age of minority	age of majority	numerical majority	numerical minority
animal, machine	human	dehumanised worker	animalistic capitalist <sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Some contemporary theorists would have problems with what could be seen as the latent essentialism of Marx’s knowing unequivocally *their* real “conditions of life”, because to know ‘the other’ (in this case, the ‘Proleteriat’, or perhaps even ‘suffering’, as a different order of experience from ‘signification’) is to be able to speak for the other, on behalf of it, and ultimately to force it to comply with its representation. Jean-Francois Lyotard’s work within the realm of postmodern ethics poses these kind of problems, displaying a sensitivity to the kind of oppositions and differences manufactured, or at least prioritised or embellished, by the order of rational signification at the expense of other realms of experience. Lyotard has a problem with the overriding generalisation and reductionism that takes place in social theory. In Sadie Plant’s words, a post-Marxist Lyotard “argued that revolutionary politics inevitably portrays the working class as helpless victims who can’t help themselves [. . .] People were not dragged screaming to the factory, at some level they must have wanted to go; in some sense they had enjoyed the privations and labours of capitalist life” (*The Most Radical Gesture* 142). The argument is that ‘they’ don’t want to be liberated by means of a revolution; perhaps they don’t see themselves in this representation at all.

<sup>15</sup> “The existence of a suffering humanity which is oppressed must of necessity be disagreeable and unacceptable for the animal world of philistines who neither act nor think but merely enjoy” (Marx quoted in McLellan, 19)

condition	remedy	condition	remedy
"part of the mechanism"	"realm of ends", enlightened age	"realm of Necessity"	"realm of Freedom"
private reason	public reason	class struggle	revolution

If the Other to the human in Kant is the spectral phenomenon of the automaton, Marx substitutes it with the more concrete metaphor of the animal, and the more literal and material referent of the worker. The conditions of the impoverished or dehumanised subject-worker, the conditions that constitute his or her consciousness or subjectivity, are extensively explored by the early 'humanist' Marx of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. Here the worker has to struggle against the forces and processes of reification and alienation in order to become human, in the same way Kant's "masses" eke their way out of ideological barbarism, but here the battle takes place in economic terrain. We see as well that the figures Marx's discourse mobilises to represent this prehumanity are the familiar Others of the animal, and the machine. The consciousness of the proletarian animal arises out of a number of alienations which are the subjective effects of an expanding process of commodity reification; a process in which relations between people take on the aspect of relations between things ("It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things" [*Capital* 165]). These conditions also constitute an assault on the integrity of the human body and labours - the body is reconstructed as a commodity-making machine: "labour not only produces commodities; it also produces itself and the workers as a commodity, and it does so in the same proportion in which it produces commodities in general" (*Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts* 324). This is a perception that doesn't change; in his introduction to *Capital* Ernest Mandel reminds the reader that "Marx himself added to the German edition of Volume 1 the note, that under capitalism, labour-power not only becomes a commodity for the capitalist but also receives this form *for the worker himself*, implying that this degradation of work is both objectively and subjectively the fate of the industrial proletariat." ('Introduction' to *Capital* 65). Firstly, or most obviously, there is the worker's alienation from the product; this is divided into two slightly different unpleasant experiences, "objectification" and "estrangement". The worker produces an 'objectification of labour' in the production of a product - the finished product which reminds him of its power over him, his bondage to *things*: "it exists *outside him*, independently of him and alien to him, and begins to confront him as an autonomous power; . . . the life which he has bestowed on the object confronts him as hostile and alien" (*Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts* 324). This is quite a radical claim: the worker is not even objectified and dominated by another subject (as in the traditional master-slave arrangement), but by an *object*. As we see in *Capital* it is human subjectivity that is sacrificed for a world of objects or commodities, *who silence humanity and speak to each*



other'<sup>16</sup>. Additionally the 'estrangement' of the object is the sense of separation from the product, the loss felt when the capitalist finally appropriates the commodity. Estrangement is also extended beyond the worker's attitude towards the single product or object, to the diminishing world of objects, which is felt to threaten his survival.

Second on Marx's list of alienations is the alienation inherent in the actual activity of industrialised labour, which leads to the reduction of the human to the animal or a state of purely biological survival. Importantly Marx sees this estrangement as "*self-estrangement*, as compared with the estrangement of the object above" (*Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts* 329). The labour of the worker-machine is 'forced labour', labour which is not his own, which is necessary purely for survival, and which has all manner of negative effects and harbours numerous perversions and inversions of the *natural* human lifestyle - "the worker only feels himself only when he is not working; when he is working he does not feel himself. He is at home when he is not working, and not at home when he is working"(326). These two spaces are analysed as rigidly differentiated under the rule of capitalism, the free home and the un-free work-place, but in another semantic twist the worker is '*not* even at home when he is at home'. Marx sees the home as the degraded place of the basically 'animal functions' of "eating, drinking and procreation", a desocialized space of additional alienation (that which is *supposed* to define properly human-social activity is communal work)<sup>17</sup>. The only possible pleasures the worker might be left with are hunted down and exorcised from the worker's consciousness, in order to represent a life of pure suffering which "mortifies his flesh and ruins his mind". (p. 328). Here the logic of capitalism is seen to force the worker into the ever-expanding zone of Kant's "private reason", now quite literally as "part of a mechanism", the mechanism of the factory or whatever other type of commodity-producing machine. This economic space increasingly saturates the worker's entire body and being, and maintains its hold for longer periods of time.

Marx moves into a third and quite tangential alienation, that of the worker's alienation from his 'species-being' or 'species-life'. Here the Kantian influence is evident, where Marx tries to concretise and demystify what was earlier discussed as the supersensible realm of moral freedom, the social world or surplus value that constitutes human 'superiority' or rationality ('practical reason'). He wants to retain this important difference while working within a materialist perspective. Within this almost zoological framework he initiates a process of definition of this 'new' concept of the human that seems to mutate as he proceeds. "Conscious life activity directly distinguishes man from animal life activity. Only because of that is he a species-being" - but Marx argues that in this upside down world of capitalism the fact of estranged labour distorts the relationship, making 'species-being' serve the

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<sup>16</sup> "In order therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain [including the commodity-form] appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race" (*Capital* 165)

<sup>17</sup> One could imagine this taken even further along the Hegelian hall of mirrors -- the worker produces, through the work of reproduction, a mini object-worker who confronts him as an alien, potentially threatening competitor. And Marx hints at it: "procreation as emasculation".

biological, individual being, the animal being of 'survival'. This difference as a fundamental distinction is grounded in the very motor of human history and production, the space of "conscious life activity"; but the ground begins slipping underneath him, and Marx has to concede what evidently strikes him as he asserts the contrary, that animals "also produce". However they don't produce art, and after a flurry of abortive, feeble qualifications, such as "man produces universally" (*Early Writings* 329), which don't satisfy him, Marx has to resort to precisely that idealism which he had hoped to demystify, that unaccountable supplement of superstructural (ideological) 'spirituality' that materialism was supposed to do away with, the nebulous realm of beauty: "man also produces in accordance with the laws of beauty" (329)<sup>18</sup>. In turn 'species life' becomes a consciousness of the built environment, and then finally Marx settles on a vague 'use' of the concept: "In general, the proposition that man is estranged from his species being means that each man is estranged from the others, and that all are estranged from man's essence" (p. 330). Why does Marx feel so obliged to defend the concept of the human against the animal, one might ask? His equation seems to be 'human animal' + 'species being' = 'human being', where 'being' signifies both verb (the conscious will) and noun (the body). One could argue that this is essentially a rehashed version of Kantian humanism, which seeks to propose a conditioned animal-being, an object subject to deterministic causal laws, overlaid with an unconditioned human freedom, a subject overcoming alienation through constructing his social environment, and through recognising other subjects and being recognised. Man's species-being is the recognition of his sociality, his essentially social nature; this is remarkably similar to the sense of 'moral freedom' that Kant is so eager to see taking root in European culture<sup>19</sup>. From this point of view Marx is a direct heir to the Germanic phenomenological apparatus (the *phenomenon-noumenon* opposition) and the emancipation narrative.

### **Foucault (goal or gaol?)**

In the philosophy of modernity Michel Foucault stands as the arch-critic of Enlightenment thought and of the Kantian project. Although undoubtedly just one of many anti-modernists that Jurgen Habermas discerns following in the wake of Nietzsche's original and absolute negation of Reason, Foucault seems to have personally taken on the figure of Kant as some sort of nemesis and yet simultaneously as some kind of mentor. Some of the more superficial indicators of his interest in Kant include his reading of the famous 'What is Enlightenment?' essay where he sees in Kant's sense of temporality or history a prototypical example of the spirit or ethos of modernity, the 'heroization of the

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<sup>18</sup> Here again the spectre of Kant emerges, in that Kant proposes a metaphysical 'purposiveness without purpose' - similar to the 'end in itself' - about the object of beauty; i.e. the mere form of the object must stimulate the perceiver of beauty, he must have no interest in it as an object.

<sup>19</sup> But although both see supersensible social or moral realms outside of the ordinary lived reality, Marx finds a *historical* reason as opposed to an eternal perceptual limitation; the reason for its obscurity lies in the development of increasingly complex modes of production, which in their naturalisation of the division of labour, alienate the truly human Utopian impulse.

present', and self-critique and self-reconstruction. For Foucault the continuity that connects us to this instance of the thinking of Enlightenment "is not faithfulness to its doctrinal elements, but rather the permanent reactivation of an attitude - that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era" (quoted in Owen, 142-143). But it is in the late work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977) that we find the most sustained yet indirect critique of Kant, Enlightenment and modernity, and it is this text that I want to gloss with regards to its mutation of the figure of the machine. This book seems to be addressed to Kant, inverting the latter's teleological movement from machines to humans, to the more dystopian movement of humans to machines. Taking a methodological form from Nietzsche, Foucault writes a genealogy of the disciplinary and regulatory discursive matrix that emerges in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to control and order burgeoning European populations. This coming-to-grips and taking hold of the problems of health, education, low productivity and governance are what he sees as a modernity of increasing power over the human, or at least the human body; of the extension of the social fields of power and the intensification of existing power relations in the construction of a human-machine. If Kant sees modernity as the historical moment in which humanity could elevate and emancipate itself from stagnant myth, power and domination, Foucault is diametrically opposed to this perspective; he almost perversely insists on seeing it as the direct opposite, as a new time of the total subjugation and occupation of the body by institutional and specialised discourses and other techniques of control.

We should see Foucault's intervention in the writing of modernity as more than just a symmetrical textual or ideological antithesis of Kant, a philosophical dispute of content; it is also a dispute of 'form', where Kant's sense of history is comic and Foucault's is tragic. Raymond Williams talks of the "contemporary reflex [of tragedy], that the taking of rational control over our social destiny is defeated or at best deeply stained by our inevitable irrationality" (*Modern Tragedy* 74). But additionally Foucault's genealogy is a self-reflexive activity which meditates on, amongst other vectors, the role of critical thought in the creation of what it purports to uncover, infer or 'deduce'. It is an activity which apart from questioning Kant's passive *reflections* on Enlightenment, questions the Enlightenment's active *constitution* or manufacturing of modernity. Habermas argues that one can contest all speech acts against three different validity claims; the assertion's normative value, its truth value, and its sincerity or authenticity. These are brought to bear respectively on the utterance's relations to the addressee (it assumes a shared standard of fairness), to the referent (it establishes truth), and itself, the addresser (it claims authenticity or expressivity). Justice, truth and sincerity are different linguistic validity claims independent of each other, written into the structure of speech situations and which can be independently challenged. Foucault doesn't just contest Kant on the issue of the normative value of Enlightenment norms and goals, or on the truth value or history of modernity, but additionally, perhaps even primarily, on his *sincerity*, on his relation to his discursive platform.

According to Foucault the reform calls of the *Ideologues*, the emergence of human rights discourse, the emancipatory rhetoric of Enlightenment, all of this was more deeply motivated by an emerging social power's desire for increased control, regulation and subjugation of an imaginary social body and the masses of individual bodies. Although control becomes an end in itself, the legal reforms of the eighteenth century were aimed at curtailing the inefficient and insufficient power of the monarch and stemming the tide of popular illegalities or crime; criticisms of public execution and the new wave of humanism were essentially the window-dressing of this political strategy. "The conjecture that saw the birth of reform is not, therefore, that of a new sensibility, but that of another policy with regard to popular illegalities" (*Discipline & Punish* 82). Where individuals located themselves in the pseudo-spectrum of 'positions' within this overarching discursive vector constructing modern subjectivity does not concern him - neither does Kant's consciousness of his contribution to this interdisciplinary strategy matter much.

Foucault insists on the relation between knowledge and power, insisting that they are intimately connected, and ends up with a new term, 'power-knowledge relations'. "We should admit power produces knowledge... that knowledge and power directly imply one another" (*Discipline & Punish* 27). Knowledge does not provide power with any kind of human agency worth mentioning; the actual subject of knowledge or the individual that takes up a subject-position within a power-knowledge space plays a minimal role in the development of knowledge. "In short it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge... but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it, and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge"(28). Foucault doesn't just take on Kant's philosophy as content or form but the philosophical Kant and the discourse in which he is situated. Habermas quotes Foucault on the significance of Kant's mistake: "Modernity begins with the incredible and unworkable idea of a being who is sovereign precisely by virtue of being enslaved, a being whose very finitude allows him to take the place of God" (*Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* 261). Foucault accuses 'him', or at least the discursive function we call 'Kant', of complicity, of being an instrumental or arch-architect of modern subjectivity, and hence the modernity of power-knowledge, or rather an instrument of instrumental reason. Foucault's logic renders a strange, perverse scene. Kant's call for an autonomous subject was in reality the guardians' desire for a subjected and organised body, for the automaton (and many uniform automata).

For Foucault there is an underside to the history of the last two or three hundred years that is normally displaced or repressed by the positive representation of the Enlightenment and the liberating humanism of the *ideologues* and reformers. This is the history of the penetration of individuals and establishment of institutions by discipline, and the construction of a modern subjectivity or soul. Here the paradigm for controlling individual bodies as well as orchestrating and organising multiple bodies is the machine:

Historians of ideas usually attribute the dream of a perfect society to the philosophers and jurists of the eighteenth century; but there was also a military dream of society; its fundamental reference was not to the state of nature, but to the meticulously subordinated cogs of a machine, not to the primal social contract, but to permanent coercions, not to fundamental rights, but to indefinitely progressive forms of training, not to the general will but to automatic docility (*Discipline and Punish*: 169).

What is significant here is the way Foucault frames his revelation - “but there was *also* a military dream” (my emphasis). He seems to give it a secretive flavour, a dream not normally acknowledged, a nightmare repressed from the conscious film of history. This unrepresentable, disinherited force is imbued with a sense of invisibility, a quality which surfaces again in his elaboration of “power”, and conspiracy - the military dream conspires and silently works towards the goal of a well-oiled mechanism (“a perfect society”) through expanding its domain. What Foucault unmasks as the ‘real’ is a dystopian teleology which symmetrically turns the utopian movement of Kant’s modernity or age of enlightenment inside out. This ‘other’ dream - what Kant thinks will be constrained under or somehow magically limited to the label “private reason” - cannot be contained within a separate sealed-off sector of society, a designated zone allowed and intended to be militarised and mechanical in its organisation; the “military dream” or “private reason” is rather a hidden, silent strategy of power that seeps or “creeps”, to some degree, into all social institutions and sets up new ones. The goals of docility and efficiency are not confined to the soldier, but extended to include any useful body in the various modern spaces of production, service and training, as well uncooperative and dangerous ones in prisons and asylums.

### **Power**

Before we examine Foucault’s metaphor of the machine it is necessary to explain the contexts out of which it emerges, namely the emergence of new, distinctly modern systems of power. In fact, in an ideological inversion which removes the primacy of the economic as a determining category, power produces the effects of the modern. Foucault sees a break in the late eighteenth century, the disappearance of torture and the decline of the spectacle of punishment (*Discipline & Punish* 8), and the emergence of the hiding of punishment: even the term changes to ‘improvement’. The letting-go of the body as the primary target of justice and the “elimination of pain” (16) are indicative of a shift of focus of juridical discourse and practice, from the body to the soul. In Foucault’s terminology the soul is seen as a kind of new prosthetic device or appendage sinisterly attached to or implanted in the innocent body. In discerning and describing the function of the modern ‘soul’ he drops the occasional lyrical phrase which appears to reveal the essence of his meaning: “the soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body” (30). He explains his study as one which attempts to demonstrate how the emerging sciences of man and a ‘humanising’ penal system cohere to produce the modern soul, the effect of a new way “in which the body is invested by power relations”

(24). The implication here is that the real break in modern history is not so much the mode of production (the Marxist view), but the emergence of a public power as multi-dimensional social strategy. The primary utilisation of the body as a force of production “is only enabled if it is [already] caught up in a system of subjection” (26).

A ‘political technology’ is proposed which is diffuse, multi-discursive but nevertheless produces coherent results. Foucault resorts to both a metaphysical, magical description of power as well as a ‘scientific’ analogy in an effort to express its form as strategy: “what the apparatuses and institutions operate is, in a sense, a micro-physics of power, whose field of validity is situated in a sense between these great functionings and the bodies themselves with their materiality and their forces” (*Discipline & Punish* 26). That he is aware that he is on figurative or non-literal ground is indicated by the repetition of the qualifying insertion “in a sense”, but he still very much wants to locate power spatially and literally, suggesting that power is invisible, magical, inhabiting space as a kind of force-field “between” subject and object. The “field” metaphor provides a hazy notion of the physical indeterminacy of power, of it being present yet absent, invisible yet everywhere. This half-analogical, half-literal attempt to represent the extremely difficult conspiracy of power is an indication of how difficult this terrain is to put into discourse or representation. It would appear we don’t really have the vocabulary to deal with the power networks of modernity, almost as if our built environment has out-complicated our capacity to describe it directly, and often Foucault resorts to metaphorical language. This undecidable oscillation between metaphor or metonym and literal sign is a phenomenon which also takes place with the deployment of the term ‘machine’ to represent the subjected modern body. Although it appears at times to be more metaphorical than literal, sometimes it becomes clear that Foucault has collapsed the distance between the ‘human’ and the ‘machine’, and the latter is the word most appropriate for the literal description of certain activities.

Foucault claims that beneath all the apparently critical appeals of the Enlightenment era the new strategy of power is emerging, driving towards a new ‘political technology’. One of the misleading impressions we have about modernity is that of the role played by penal reform in the break with the past age. According to Foucault the reform movement that emerged from the Enlightenment had as its objective “not to punish less, but to punish better” (*Discipline & Punish* 82), particularly as a means to curb the growing illegalities. It aimed to improve the efficiency, regularity and exactitude of the power to punish far more than it aimed to bring about the humanist ideals often primarily associated with it. He then retraces the reformists theorisation of a “semio-technique” (94) of punishment that sought to dissuade repetition of the crime, by creating a natural, spontaneous link in people’s minds between the crime and its now specified punishment. Although the reformists were against imprisonment, prisons suddenly became the basic form of punishment in the early nineteenth century (115). Whereas the reformists envisaged the manifestation of a soul through the circulation of representations (what we might call publicity) (127-8), the prisons focused on the body behind walls, creating an obedient and

malleable subject. This discrepancy Foucault puts down to the fact that in the late eighteenth century one is in fact “confronted with three ways of organising the power to punish” (130), the old monarchical law, the juridical reformers, and the prison to which correspond three separate technologies of power: the inefficient spectacle, the semio-technique, and bodily discipline (131).

### **Discipline: Installing the Machine**

Foucault’s conception of the significant impact of ‘the disciplines’ on human life in modernity is of particular relevance to my analysis of the representation of the machine in the writing of modernity. It is discipline as a technique of the half-hidden strategy of ‘political anatomy’ (*Discipline & Punish* 138), as a mode of constructing the body as a machine - or as part of a machine - for specific uses, that is the hidden secret of what Foucault still presents generally in enigmatic-metaphorical form (‘power’) and more particularly in elusive shorthand as a threatening conspiracy (‘power-knowledge’); discipline as a technology - the secret other of the human. Both Kant and Foucault’s writing of the other seem to depend on an ‘organic-natural’ versus ‘inorganic-mechanical’ opposition. But where Kant saw the other of the human as the machine, Foucault rewrites the human, the ‘natural’ dwelling or at-homeness of humanity, in the relatively unconstrained body; what threatens the human body is the rhetorically ‘human’, the new, essentially legal, subjectivity deployed by the guardians of the soul. In introducing the concept of discipline Foucault asserts that in the classical age “the great book of Man-the-Machine was written simultaneously on two registers” (*Discipline & Punish* 136), the anatomico-metaphysical register, as initiated by Descartes, and the technico-political register. The first was an analysis and writing of the static body-machine, whereas the second treated the body-machine in motion, taking responsibility for, training, and correcting its movements, its operations in time. Foucault claims “there was a useful body and an intelligible body” (136), separate entities supervised by different kinds of technicians, although they were both required for instilling the common aim of ‘docility’ in the body. The disciplines had undoubtedly existed previously but what was new was the scale of control. Firstly, the individual body, its mechanism, was now the target of discipline as opposed to a body of people; secondly the object of discipline was the careful coordination of the body in motion; finally, the modality of discipline, “constant coercion”, repetitive supervision (137). Discipline, as a specific power, produced a direct relation between obedience or docility and utility in the body, which were mutually reinforcing. The expansion of this new method was not sudden, and did not emanate from a particular institution developing by circulating through - and cross-fertilising between - educational institutions, military institutions, hospitals and industrial workshops (138).

Foucault’s analysis of the new way discipline moulds the human being into a functional mechanism results in four types of simultaneous individuality: cellular, organic, genetic and combinatory. The cellular individual arises out of his spatial distribution, his own analysed space, within the barracks, the classroom, the factory, and according to rank, or some kind of hierarchical grid

(*Discipline & Punish* 141-2). The organic individual emerges from training and the meticulous control of his activity and bodily operations in relation to specific tasks. Control of the individual's time in relation to the new concept of linear development creates the genetic individual, and 'the composition of forces' or the co-ordination of the individuals actions in relation to the group or collective body (the soldier to the unit) produces the combinatory individual (164). In his discussion of these different methods and processes Foucault repeatedly refers to the machine, to what one can only assume to be the common blueprint of 'the machine', for both bodies and the disciplinary mechanisms themselves. "The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges. A 'political anatomy', which was also a 'mechanics of power', was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wants, but so that they may operate as one wishes" (*Discipline & Punish* 138). This sentence demonstrates both kinds of reference to the machine, the "machinery of power" as well as the body that no longer "does", that comforting, simple description of voluntary activity, but "operates", as - and possibly with - a machine. In discussing the control of activities Foucault describes the relation of synthesis that the body must have with the machine, a relation wrought by discipline in the kind of exercise called the 'manoeuvre' : "it constitutes a body-weapon, body-tool, body-machine complex" (153). In the composition of forces he sees the major task and thrust of the discipline. Its job is "to construct a machine whose effect will be maximised by the concerted articulation of the elementary parts of which it is composed. Discipline is no longer singly an art of distributing bodies...but of composing forces in order to obtain an efficient machine" (164). If "forces" too strongly implies just the acceptable 'fighting machine' of the military structure, Foucault finds it in the school of the classical era as well. "The school became a machine for learning, in which each pupil, each level and each moment, if correctly combined, were permanently utilized in the general process of teaching" (165). In his discussion of the move from spectacle to surveillance and Panopticism Foucault again chooses the term 'machine', this time not to describe the modern body or a disciplinary mechanism, but rather to define the nature of contemporary Western society. "We are much less Greeks than we believe. We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves because we are part of its mechanism" (*Discipline & Punish* 217). If the tone here is somewhat stagey, bordering on the revelatory, it is because Foucault is concluding his section on discipline and feels it is time for the narrative denouement, the revelation of a general condition, and this he offers as the machine

The question of how to interpret Foucault's vision of modernity - and it is here made clear that "we" are still in the age of discipline - forces itself on 'us'. Does Foucault judge this age of control in any way, does the recurring image of the machine indicate something that *should* be alien to the human world? Within the field of science-fiction criticism the man-machine figure has been discussed quite extensively as a binary opposition loaded with connotation, an abundance of meaning. In a discussion



of cyborgs in science-fiction film Forest Pyle argues that man-machine and humanity-technology dualisms have supposed organic and mechanical essences. At the same time as (usually quite obviously) representing a threat to humanity, technology enables and is crucial to the dialectical definition of that humanity, to its 'organicness' ('Making Cyborgs, Making Humans: Of Terminators and Blade Runners' 228), and, as one could extrapolate, its 'naturalness'. In their essay 'Technophobia' Kellner and Ryan detect a conservative politics in 1970's science fiction films in which "technology was frequently a metaphor for everything that threatened 'natural' social arrangements, and conservative values associated with nature were generally mobilized as antidotes to the threat" (58). However in Foucault's schema there is no such affirmation of a corresponding force of 'humanity'; although words such 'technology', 'mechanism', 'technique' and 'machine' abound, the word which describes the 'human' is usually just 'bodies'. The machine or the mechanical has no binary opposite in the field of power - even the individual body is sometimes described as a machine. This is because for Foucault the machine is not a clear-cut metaphor, for which a literal meaning can always be substituted; the machine is often inseparable from the human or the body in the power-gaze of modernity, the body and subject *becomes* a machine. This vision of modernity then yields up a final reading of the vastly expressive figure of the Replicant, and of the generic 'cyborg' trope: a world of complex social control in which power saturates public space and invests the body, transforming it into a useful and productive 'thing', regulating its physical and mental health mechanistically, is incommensurable with a view of the supplement of human autonomy, and the soul. The Replicant is thus the symbolic manifestation of this disguised yet niggling contradiction - the cyborg represents in accessible or representational form, what Foucault himself resorts to describing in metaphor: the colonisation in modernity of the human body by the new 'political technologies' of the body -- "the soul is the prison of the body".

### **Conclusion : tragedy as a response to autonomy**

At this point I would like to preempt my discussion of the sublime in the following chapter, an analysis of the postmodern sublime which looks at the difficulties of presenting both contemporary technological complexities and its macrocosmic reflection, the world economic system, in other words the 'here' and 'there' of capitalism. For now I want to look at a slightly different take on a diachronic as opposed to geographical sublime, what one could provisionally call the "historical sublime". This involves the failure of representation to account for the vastness of the temporal depth of history, a history of humanity which seems, at certain sublime moments or glimpses, to come from nowhere and be heading nowhere, disordered and cruel, perhaps not the history of a 'humanity' at all. This is perhaps what D. H. Lawrence expresses as lying behind good tragedy, "this setting behind the small action of (the) protagonists the terrific action of unfathomed nature; setting a smaller system of morality, the one grasped and formulated by the human consciousness within the vast, uncomprehended

and incomprehensible morality of nature or of life itself, surpassing human consciousness” (quoted in Williams’ *Modern Tragedy* 123). For Kant the human subject lives mostly in the sensible world of appearances and cause and effect, and its perceptual apparatus and understanding is not adequate to deal with infinite spatial and temporal regressions. We could add that when the cultural constructs of temporality, teleology, narrative are momentarily transcended or fall away, history glimpsed as directionless mutation - being rather unsettling - receives a kind of overcompensation from the anxious mind; eager to put human history back on track, it invests history with a kind of secret genetic structure, a hidden or internal utopian essence, or narrative logic, what Lawrence discerns as a ‘morality’ (although we have just seen in Foucault how this can be transfigured into a dystopian *telos*). One can discern this in Kant’s early essay, ‘Idea of a Cosmopolitical History’, where “the history of the human race, viewed as a whole, may be regarded as the realization of a hidden plan of nature to bring about a political constitution . . . as the only state in which all the capacities implanted by her in mankind can be fully developed” (Translator’s Preface to *Critique of Practical Reason* ix). Marx also injects a conspiratorial fluid into the beast of history, a figuration in which history is narrativised: “It [communism] is the solution of the riddle of history and knows itself to be the solution. The entire movement of history is therefore both the *actual* act of creation of communism - the birth of its empirical existence - and, for its thinking consciousness, the *comprehended* and *known* movement of its *becoming*”. The “riddle of history” indicates the aporia that opens up before the historiographer’s gaze, the immense perplexity and complexity of “the entire movement” which Marx claims to have solved. What is ironic about Marx’s revelation is that at the moment at which it lays claim to the transparency and clarity of its discourse and historical *vision*, a historical referent outside of language or narrative, it has to resort back to *hallucinatory* metaphor - and the dimension of language - to express it (“riddle”, “solution”). Metaphor points to the creation and projection of meaning. Additionally the analogical or comparative function of metaphor ironically depends on foregrounding that very space between narrative or textuality (words) and reality (things) that was supposed to be collapsed in knowledge; metaphor suggests that language isn’t sufficient or adequate. With regard to the content of the views expressed above, it should be made clear that these secret machinations of history are of course not the sublime themselves, but rather the traces of a conquered (or at least restrained) sublime feeling - they are haunted, with varying degrees of ‘presence’, by that desperate sense of terror that the larger social or natural story or picture eludes one’s representational faculties, that it can’t be told or seen. Tragedy testifies to the unrepresentable in history; although a hermeneutic structure or way of seeing predating the discourse of emancipation, it is possibly the generic form informing the dystopian or anti-emancipation narrative underlying the Foucauldian ‘nightmare’ of history. As Lawrence points out, tragedy involves the revelation of the fragility and fictionality of human purpose and improvement; it strips its characters of autonomy and development and shows the overwhelming might of external or environmental forces (whether these be Nature or ‘political technology’).

The figure of the machine in sociology is not a sign patented by Foucault. The significance of the machine as a metaphor and underlying or implicit model for the reorganisation of productive forces is something that both Foucault and an earlier Max Weber draw our attention to. With regard to the metaphor Jameson draws our attention to the fantasy impulse in the work of this school of the 'hard' "vision of the total system": "the first group projects a fantasy future of a "totalitarian" type in which the mechanisms of domination. . . are grasped as irrevocable and all pervasive" (*Political Unconscious* 92). There is the suggestion here of a sado-masochistic *view* of history, in which pleasure is derived through suffering, humanity 'tied down' and subjugated. Of course the machine isn't just an attractive image or symbol, sheer form, it is also a 'content' - they both discern the machine as a fundamental blueprint for modern subjectivity. According to Dandeker, Weber "argues that, in the field of administration, bureaucracy is analogous to the machine in the extent to which subjective or irrational elements of will and mood are eliminated" (9). Dandeker reckons that Foucault goes further, looking at the body-machine, the individual body and subjectivity not just as "a regulated cog in the administrative machine" (*Surveillance, Power & Modernity* 13), but as reconstructed by a whole range of public and private discourses and disciplines as a machine in its own right. Both share a vision of the growing power of the bureaucratic or institutional machine, in which subjects find their place, as in Kant's "part of a mechanism". For Weber they are presumably left to exude some animal warmth outside of the economic domain, although even this is doubtful when confronted with the Blakean imagery in his well-known 'iron cage' metaphor:

The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so. For when asceticism was carried out of the monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order. This order is bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which today determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force. Perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized fuel is burnt. In Baxter's view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the saint 'like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment.' But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage. (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, quoted in Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* 90)

Apart from the very obvious dramatic finality of that magnificent metaphor placed at the very end of the sentence<sup>20</sup>, the destination of the modernisation process, what strikes us is the distinctly tragic sense of inevitability or necessity, the mechanical logic of "fate". The ironic and "irresistible force" of "fate" is a narrative causality most often associated with the genre of tragedy, and several cultural theorists

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<sup>20</sup> Jameson notes Weber's 'theatricality' in "Weber's dramatic notion of the "iron cage"" (*The Political Unconscious* 90)

have commented on the persistence of the tragic form and other generic codes in historiography and other apparently realist or empirical discourses. Hayden White reflects on the tropological determination of the style of a history, and suggest there are at least three ways in which a historiographical reading is shaped: “interpretation thus enters into historiography in at least three ways: aesthetically (in the choice of a narrative strategy), epistemologically (in the choice of an explanatory paradigm), and ethically” (quoted in Leitch 126). Thus in terms of the first variable (narrative strategy or emplotment) we find a historical mode adopting one of four genre options as: romance, tragedy, comedy or satire (*Deconstructive Criticism* 126). White argues that Marx, following Hegel, developed a Comic view of history, in insisting on the “right of life over death” and a Utopia to come<sup>21</sup>. Once again Jameson has something to say on the matter. In *The Political Unconscious* he defends Marxism against a claim (probably White’s) that reads it as comic in its Utopian leanings, and he argues that it too can in fact be just as easily seen as an essentially tragic vision, without actually resorting to this term: “we must observe that the most powerful realizations of a Marxist historiography...remain visions of historical Necessity...Necessity is here represented in the form of the inexorable logic involved in the determinate failure of all the revolutions that have taken place in human history...History is therefore the experience of Necessity...History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis, which its “ruses” turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their overt intention” (101-2). Here in the last sentence, with the mention of “ironic reversals”, history seems to be taking on the narrative form of tragedy.

Strangely Jameson doesn’t discuss tragedy here as a generic form, although it is clear that there must be some relation to (possibly a defense of ) Raymond Williams’ thesis of the connection between tragedy and a properly socialist sensibility. Both seem to share a belief, contrary to White’s emphasis on revolution, that Marxism or socialism is tragic in its retention of a past of recurring suffering and failure which it won’t surrender. Jameson’s view of Necessity as “the determinate failure of all the revolutions” certainly sounds a lot like Williams’ tormented appeal to a tragically perpetual struggle - “the final truth in this matter seems to be that revolution - the long revolution against human alienation, produces, in real historical circumstances, its own new kinds of alienation, which it must struggle to understand and which it must overcome, if it is to remain revolutionary” (*Modern Tragedy* 82). According to Williams’ point of view the tragedy here is the fact that these mistakes continue to be made, that true human emancipation is constantly thwarted, deferred, and in the paralysis of this insight, all one can do is hope and remember. Williams suggests that possibly socialism, as a properly human way of viewing society and remembering history, hasn’t yet fully developed. “Socialism, I believe, is the true and active inheritor of the impulse to human liberation which has previously taken so

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<sup>21</sup> Jameson quotes White quite extensively on this point, in a footnote in his ‘Magical Narratives’ chapter of *The Political Unconscious*, including this sentence: “Marx carried this Comic conception even further; he envisioned nothing less than the dissolution of that ‘society’ in which the contradiction between consciousness and being had to be entertained as a fatality for all men in all times” (103).

many forms. But in practice, I also believe, it is an idea still forming, and much that passes under its name is only a residue of old positions" (*Modern Tragedy* 74-5). He goes on to suggest that present Marxist societies have not yet succeeded in 'revolution' in the fullest sense, which he appears to connect with a final and "total redemption of humanity", an idea which he quotes from Marx: "I see revolution as the inevitable working through of a deep and tragic disorder, to which we can respond in various ways but which will in any case, in one way or another, work its way through our world as a consequence of any of our actions. I see revolution...in a tragic perspective" (75). Both tragedy and its newer incarnation in socialism are simultaneously driven by the hope of ultimate emancipation and pessimistically aware of the elusiveness and distance of this goal.

### **CHAPTER THREE : POSTMODERNISM - FROM THE BODY-MACHINE TO THE CULTURE INDUSTRY**

Artists will confuse sending with creation. They will camp around screeching 'a new medium' until their rating drops off....Philosophers will bark around the ends and means hassle not knowing that *sending can never be a means to anything but more sending, like Junk.*

William Burroughs, *The Naked Lunch*

## Introduction: Popular culture = cultural materialism: the waning of affect in postmodernism

Kant said that there was a secret mechanism in the soul which prepared direct intuitions in such a way that they could be fitted into the system of pure reason. But today that secret has been deciphered.

Adorno & Horkheimer, 'The Culture Industry'.

One of the dominant moods of postmodernism - by which I mean less the objects of elitist postmodernist *theory*, such as Hutcheon's 'historiographical meta-fiction', but following Jameson, the cultural dominant or *Zeitgeist* - is one of moral or ethical amnesia. The humanist insistence on a programme of universal morality, and its conferral of a sacrosanct value on human life, no longer have hegemonic status in the contemporary milieu of popular or media culture - whole genres, such as the action-thriller, and texts have learned to forget human empathy and omit respect for the estranged other (this being an observation and not a moral accusation). The impressionistic sense of an increase in the intensity and quantity of violence in both film and television in the last few decades seems to point to the demise of the state's ideological monopoly on justice, as Clint Eastwood's Dirty Harry executes 'rough justice', Bruce Lee administers 'Chinese justice' and Arnold Schwarzenegger supplies a cybernetic solution. Biological aggression and competitiveness are now no longer inferior to the now suspect 'ideological' principles of community and respect. Obviously the popularisation of the 'new' evolutionism or gene-theory is partly responsible: the self-proclaimed 'scientific' key to previously philosophical questions about human life, popular genetics, such as Richard Dawkins' 'selfish gene' theory, dismisses all that archaic philosophy about human nature and culture as so much hog-wash -- all this contributes to the redundancy or a popular denunciation of ethics.

This erosion of the Enlightenment humanism of a universal ethics and a superior moral realm fits well under Jameson's rubric of the 'waning of affect' in postmodernism. The postmodern mechanism of pleasure offered to the viewer no longer involves the emotional charge of *representation* and the *affirmation* of the social contract, but consists of something more like pure *presentation*, the mind-altering drug's open commitment to mood enhancement, the biochemical rush or 'intensities' Jameson evokes as part of the "aesthetic model" of schizophrenia, and constitutes an *affirmation* of the individual's right to pleasure<sup>22</sup>. What replaces psychic *affect*, 'deep' and lasting emotional resonance, is a 'surface' excitement, *effect* as ephemeral and disposable mechanical-physiological stimulation, in terms of strategy, a move from ideology to biology. The exemplary postmodern film then, according to this schema, is one which is orientated around a calculated chemistry of the body - the unformulated question that seems to dominate the space of film production is 'how much can we stimulate those

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<sup>22</sup> See Daniel Bell's condemnation of the "axial" pleasure principle underlying consumer culture in *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, pp 477-78.

adrenaline glands?’ (or rather ‘how to squeeze some more adrenaline out of that already overworked endocrinal system?’).

To what degree, one might ask, does this shift in the technology of film change the way the social institution of the cinema is perceived, in what way does it reflect and relate to a broader culture or mechanism of the cultivation and satisfaction of the body? The advent and institutionalisation of the video recorder and video industry have definitely contributed to the erosion of the sense of social occasion of film watching, of viewing the act of viewing as a social action in terms of both medium and message - to articulate this sense of occasion and duty would result in something like “we are here, now, and in this space, gathered together to be entertained but also educated”. The cinema, in this respect, is not the space it used to be; whereas once it propagated, maintained, or contributed to local, national and possibly international ‘community’ (or the lived ‘illusion’ thereof), and the collective goal of moral improvement (in the Kantian sense of “the highest good” achievable through ‘practical reason’), it is now perceived primarily as a material phenomenon, a technology of physical pleasure operating on the individual body<sup>23</sup>. This is a change of function in the worlds of production as well as consumption. It is now consciously geared towards and utilised as either a guaranteed pleasure-inducing commodity, like a Coke or Big Mac, or a nostalgic flight back to the ‘romance of the movies’. The question asks itself, to what extent is part of the pleasure here (in the cinema) the pseudo-realisation or sense that, like the more obvious junk-food rush, any cinema movie is a guaranteed winner because it is part of a global distribution network? One feels safe because the global ‘market’ has ensured the survival of the fittest commodity, one feels excited, awed, to the point of the (Kantian) sublime because incomprehensibly massive and absurd amounts of capital and human labour have gone into its realisation and perfection. Debord’s revelatory one-liner, “the spectacle is capital to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image” (*Society of the Spectacle* paragraph 34), captures this idea of the movie-commodity as pure ‘surplus’ production being ‘nationalised’ or made public, re-routed to the masses. Film, as a consumable commodity offered to the citizen, becomes a poor substitute or compensation for the collective ownership of surplus production. One feels a perverted sense of ‘connectedness’ with other purchasers and consumers all over the world (one which feebly compensates for the absence of those already enfeebled earlier pseudo-communities of race, class and nation).

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<sup>23</sup> This might seem somewhat hyperbolic to some: surely the fifties and sixties cinema was also a space of fun, as the nostalgia films of adolescent turbulence represent? Undoubtedly so, but the point I am trying to make is that this emergent lack of empathy (for characters) and ironic detachment from the moral domain (or situation) appears to be of the same order as the symptom of ‘the waning of affect’ that Jameson identifies as a facet of the new aesthetic dominant. This is consistent with the atomism, alienation or physiological individualism, which are part and parcel of a new cultural mechanism whose means and end are the isolated individual, as body and subject. As Debord says, “It is the same project everywhere: *a restructuring without community*” (*Society of the Spectacle* paragraph 192). In the fifties the cinema (in the dual sense of meaning and social space) tolerated or encouraged the co-existence of aesthetics and ethics; now ethics is subsumed by, and consumed as, the aesthetic (experience in pure commodity form).



This would all appear to be heading towards an affirmation of Jameson's notion, central to his analysis of postmodernism, that postmodernity is the time of our (in the largest sense, pertaining to the 'masses') becoming aware of the *materiality* of culture. According to him cinema or film is not the social apparatus or aesthetic medium that is most definitive of this spirit of the age, being tied to a Modernist trajectory towards the end (in both senses) of the high modern *auteur* of the fifties. For Jameson, democratised and disposable (digital) video tape is emblematic of postmodernism. More than anything else the rise of what is commonly and appropriately called the mass media has forced this realisation, this sense of a secular and material (and materialistic) culture, the original philosophical sense of 'modernity', into the minds of Western consumers at some level.

Capitalism, and the modern age, is a period in which, with the extinction of the sacred and the "spiritual", the deep, underlying materiality of all things has finally risen dripping and convulsive into the light of day; and it is clear that culture is one of those things whose fundamental materiality is now for us not merely evident but quite inescapable. This has, however been a historical lesson for us: it is because culture has *become* material that we are now in a position to understand that it always *was* material, in its structures and functions. We postcontemporary people have a word for that discovery - a word that has tended to displace the older genres and forms - and this is of course the word *medium*, and in particular its plural, *media*, a word which conjoins three relatively distinct signals: that of an artistic mode or specific form of aesthetic production, that of a specific technology, generally organised around a central apparatus or machine; and finally that of a social institution ('Surrealism without the Unconscious' 67).

Jameson goes on to prescribe the three respective aspects of 'mass' media that need to be investigated in analysing or providing definition of any specific medium, the "multiple dimensions of the material, social and aesthetic" (67). Hopefully my discussion of the cinema has touched on these various dimensions. What I would like to remark on firstly is what appears on first impression to be a strange inconsistency or contradiction in the observation above. How can Jameson maintain in the same breath that the materiality of culture "finally" emerges (as if it always *was* material), but then say that it is only because it "becomes" material through postmodern mass media that we can retrospectively see its materiality. One tends to think either culture *was* or *was not* material; upon reflection two answers present themselves - either culture has always been 'material' in its effects and functions (as Jameson maintains), or pre-modern or technological culture wasn't material, but our contemporary 'reality' including mechanically-minded discourse orientated towards hegemonic material concerns of 'function' and 'mechanism' enable and produce the materiality of past ages. Jameson, as I have remarked, seems to mention both, although he settles for the latter, a quasi-poststructuralist, McLuhanite view of successive 'modes of aesthetic production', where the 'medium is the message'. McLuhan refigures language as an initial technology:

The spoken word was the first technology by which man was able to let go of his environment in order to grasp it in a new way. Words are a kind of information retrieval that can range over the total environment and experience at high speed. Words are complex systems of metaphors and symbols that translate experience into our uttered or outered senses. They are a technology of explicitness. (*Understanding Media* 64).

The same revelation marks the writing of Lewis Mumford in *The Myth of the Machine: Technics and Human Development*, where language is implicated as some kind of proto-technology, one which prepares the way for the construction of the 'mega-machine' in power societies: "Though language was man's potent symbolic expression it flowed, I shall attempt to show, from the common source that finally produced the machine" (9). One doesn't need to point to Wittgenstein's lesson in the *Philosophical Investigations* about the plurality and irreducibility of 'language games' (or Lyotard's or Habermas' work for that matter) to recognise the limits of a view of language as tool, technology or machine. As tool it serves an instrumental function for the autonomous subject, or on the other extreme, the inverse of this perspective, but ultimately just as illusory, it is the instrument or tool of 'power', the 'elite' or language itself. The poststructuralist (or what Jameson elsewhere rewrites as more totally or structurally postmodern) views on language *qua* material signifying system also manufacture or produce a sense of the 'verbal' medium as just one technology among others. Language, as an eternal or transhistorical constant as system, becomes a writing machine (Derrida), a normalising or power machine (Foucault), a subject-machine (Lacan).

In the same way Marx's language projected or abstracted a transhistorical constant, the 'mode of production', in which the 'economic' or production is the central and recurring category. What his framework didn't seem to recognise was its own historicity - the primacy and differentiation of the economic that only fully emerges in the ultra-rationalised society of capitalism gets projected back retrospectively across all ages. McLuhan points to this distinctly modern 'theme' of the economy and of work: "In the first great age of the substitution of machine for human toil Carlyle and the Pre-Raphaelites promulgated the doctrine of Work as a mystical social communion, and millionaires like Ruskin and Morris toiled like navvies for aesthetic reasons. Marx was an impressionable recipient of these doctrines." (*Understanding Media* 51). Addressing early representations of 'the Hottentot' (sic) at the Cape, J. M. Coetzee points out how for the emerging anthropological discourse on 'Man', the absence of a distinguishable category of the economic in the observed culture was seen as an absolute scandal<sup>24</sup>. The insult to this discourse, with its preconceived and hierarchical structure of separated social activities and institutions, could only be resolved by its angry and accusatory projection of "idleness" onto its object, the Hottentot.

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<sup>24</sup> See his 'Idleness in South Africa' in the collection of essays, *White Writing*: "The moment when the travel writer condemns the Hottentot for doing nothing is the moment when the Hottentot brings him face to face (if only he will recognize it) with his own preconceptions" (24).

Looking at the language-question we see how Jameson, in another essay, 'Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *does* manage to arise out of the trap of making one's own contemporary problems the bane of all ages. He points to the historical embeddedness of poststructuralism in the cultural dominant of a superficial postmodern effect of depthlessness, how its dismissal of the inside and outside, of depth-models (psychoanalytic, Marxist etc.), conform to this aesthetic - he shows how "the poststructuralist critique of the hermeneutic, of what I shall shortly call the depth-model, is useful for us as a very significant symptom of the very postmodernist culture which is our subject here" ('Postmodernism' 12). Presumably he would also concede that apart from the fact that these contemporary theories refract the whole in ways which expose themselves as symptom of the postmodern malaise itself (a point he wants to foreground), they also contribute as constitutive or affirmative 'causes' to this hegemonic cultural space. If one accepts the creative or destructive power of a cultural *zeitgeist* to determine and provide the dominant metaphors and models by which culture is thought then the whole materialist vocabulary, with its concepts and metaphors of 'media', 'function', 'mechanism', 'production' and 'technology', would seem to be historically contingent, part and parcel of our contemporary cultural perspective, and not the only or final means by which pre-capitalist or non-western societies and languages can be understood. With regard to societies where, for instance, there is no clear line between religious activity and economic production there would appear to be no logic in trying to abstract what Jameson refers to as an 'aesthetic mode of production', "organised around a central apparatus or machine". Here we must also credit Lewis Mumford for acknowledging that in many periods of human history, what we now call technology was "inseparable"<sup>25</sup> from other human activities: "At its point of origin technics was related to the whole nature of man...thus technics, at the beginning, was broadly life-centred, not work-centred or power-centred" (*The Myth of the Machine* 9).

From this foothold one could begin to reflect back on our contemporary culture, often too hastily reduced to the obvious mechanism of the 'mass media' or the 'Culture Industry', as an opaque medium, or at least as activity not always already transparent, and think beyond the immediacy rendered by empiricist assumptions of medium as machine. But having pointed out the dangers of making generalizations and metaphysical statements about the essence of culture, what is important to acknowledge is the degree to which the mass media have accentuated and rendered hegemonic a certain *aspect* and way of looking at culture - postmodernism has 'materiality' as one of its favourite flavours. The conspiracy theory of historical materialism has a certain popular equivalent in the paranoia and conspiracies that abounds in popular culture - control and manipulation are revealed at every turn, and the common cultural practice (whether in pulp sociology or fictional device) of the unmasking of

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<sup>25</sup> "The classic Greek term 'tekne' characteristically makes no distinction between industrial production and 'fine' or symbolic art; and for the greater part of human history these aspects were inseparable, one side respecting the the objective conditions and functions, the other responding to subjective needs" (*The Myth of the Machine* 9).

'ideology' and 'propaganda' at work indicate a wariness and awareness of the power and instrumentality of ideas, of the mechanism of language. What Jameson discerns, and what is here affirmed, is the development of a general 'sensibility', a democratisation of materialism, an explosion of codes and styles, which makes it far easier for cultural or linguistic practices to be *seen*, not for what they are, but *as* 'material', and no longer as 'spiritual'.

### RECONSTITUTING *BLADE RUNNER*

...but if there were machines bearing the image of our bodies, and capable of imitating our actions as far as it is morally possible...

Rene Descartes

#### **Body-parts in the philosophical rubbish dump**

In the preceding chapter I attempted to show how a certain strand of thinking the human in modernity could be seen as a continuous process of semiotic accumulation, a transgenerational thinking and imagining, a remembering and a mutation, in which the figure of technology or the machine pops up in some guise or other. The dominant fantasy-terrain in which this thought takes place is a battlefield which sees forces of freedom pitted against those of necessity, determinism, and enslavement. These conflicts manifest themselves in synchronic systems as well as in the form of narrative, whether it be the allegorical journey to maturity suggesting the dialectical logic of freedom and the moral will, or the proletariat, or even Nietzsche's 'overman' of tomorrow. Not having dealt with Nietzsche's philosophy in much depth I do not want to suggest that he merely counters Kant -- it is often assumed his thinking marks a complete reversal of Kant's Utopian teleology of humanity. Although he replaces Kant's subject of history, the whole of humanity, with the privileged minority of thinkers able to overcome morality, the basic structure of the realm of necessity opposed to a realm of freedom stays the same, and the figure of the machine is retained to express the crushing 'diminution' of necessity. Nietzsche maintains that "that total machinery, the solidity of all the wheels, represents total exploitation of man: but it presupposes those on whose account this exploitation has a meaning. Otherwise, it would be a mere total diminution, a value diminution, of the type Man . . . a regressive phenomenon in the grandest style" (quoted in Cooper 114). The increasing degradation and stunting of human life under economic growth and modernisation needs to be redeemed, or justified, by the emergence of a superior or 'higher' man who is enabled to transcend this realm of necessity; Nietzsche explains, "my metaphor for the [justifying] type is, as one knows, the word "overman" " (quoted in Cooper 115).

Having explored or at least surveyed these various (yet similar) takes on the struggles of the modern era we can interpret them along the lines of a hermeneutic outlined by Jameson in *The Political*

*Unconscious*, where he discusses the concept of the 'ideologeme' at work in the second allegorical level of meaning of a text. The 'ideologeme' is the minimal functional unit of a class discourse, the *parole* or 'utterance' of a class, located in a determinate historical situation and a dialogical cultural field of competing ideologemes - like our philosophies above, it can take either diachronic or synchronic form.

The ideologeme is an amphibious formation, whose essential structural characteristic may be described as its possibility to manifest itself either as a pseudoidea - a conceptual or belief system, an abstract value, an opinion or prejudice - or as a protonarrative, a kind of ultimate class fantasy about the collective characters which are the classes in opposition. This duality means that the basic requirement for the full description of the ideologeme is already given in advance: as a construct it must be susceptible to both a conceptual description and a narrative manifestation at once. The ideologeme can of course be elaborated in either of these descriptions, taking on the finished appearance of a philosophical system on the one hand, or that of a cultural text on the other (*Political Unconscious* 87)

From this description one gathers that a text, manifested in one form or the other, partakes or exists as only one ideologeme. It is thus not usually a site dominated by more than one class discourse, and it presumably also manifests an ideologeme distinct from others possible within the parameters of a class *langue* (meaning not all bourgeois cultural texts contain the same ideologeme). However in his later essay 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' Jameson points to the exceptional example of Doctorow's *Ragtime*, which appears to cut across any particular view of reality, by deploying different kinds of character-objects: "... the objects of representation, ostensibly narrative characters, are incommensurable and, as it were, of incomparable substances, like oil and water - Houdini being a *historical* figure, Tateh, a *fictional* one, and Coalhouse an *intertextual* one - ... What such a description would want to register is the paradox that a seemingly realistic novel like *Ragtime* is in reality a non-representational work that combines fantasy signifiers from a variety of ideologemes in a kind of hologram" (23). It appears that what Jameson wants to demonstrate here is how this newer text 'resists interpretation', and conveys a sense of the loss of an older, easier access to the real or History; but for our purposes it would be beneficial to highlight his identification of the combination of "fantasy signifiers from a variety of ideologemes" in this more complicated of postmodern texts.

I would like to argue that one could see *Blade Runner* in a similar light as a text in which the various signifiers of the specifically philosophical ideologemes of modernity (those which, according to Jameson, might have "the finished appearance of philosophical systems") come to die, a semiotic cemetery as such, in which no particular ideologeme out of the various we have discussed in the previous chapter comes to haunt more strongly than the other. Here I depart from the emphasis that Jameson puts on the ideologeme emanating from a class discourse or *langue*, retaining or emphasising

what it is 'about', namely a political fantasy about class. It is tautological to talk about classical and modern philosophical systems as essentially 'class' languages, philosophy being *a priori* a 'ruling class' and esoteric commodity, and it tends to limit their effects to the predominantly and general 'ideological' function of maintaining the status quo. Where the analysis of the ideologeme as a unit is useful is in its emphasis on the historical contexts (and here we would want to assert the specificity and plurality of each of *these*), the social and discursive conditions of formation in which the text (protonarrative or philosophical system) is situated. An ideologeme's 'historicity' would thus be its response to and resolution of a given social and technological situation, which always involves conflict, contradiction or at least difference between groups, social strata or classes. Hence Kant's Enlightenment scenario involves or fantasises the weakening of the minority clergy's hold over the larger whole of the population, and the resolution of an enlightened mass consciousness.

In *Blade Runner* the historicity and redundancy of these various philosophical ideologemes is foregrounded. These grand narratives and fantasies, having been popularised, canned and circulated in the twentieth-century media age, get reduced to a whiff of Nazi-Nietzsche, the faintest of Kantian flavours, a hint of that unfashionable product (and its even worse marketing campaign) sold as 'revolution'. Rather than playing any kind of properly ideological role or animating role in the film these 'ideas' serve a kind of decorative, surface function, as pure, and fairly lifeless signifiers, if anything ironically coming together to connote a sense of 'philosophicalness', and here unmasking just so many personal style-codes and strategic techniques of control, while also expressing a nostalgia for a kind of thinking no longer possible. This film can thus be read on one level (the level of the ideologeme) as a mass of used and rusting spare-parts, decaying pseudo-ideas and fading parables; in Jameson's idiom, just so much recycled postmodern 'junk', irreversibly intermingled and reassembled to create another "henceforth themeless film" (*Geopolitical Aesthetic* 25).

Jameson, this time in an analysis of the masterful David Cronenberg's 'cyberpunk' classic *Videodrome* (1983), discusses the decay of the value of the philosophical concept, and of the philosophical project or impulse more generally, in a nostalgic tone reminiscent of Adorno. He seems to be arguing that with the erosion of the distinction between high and low art in postmodernism, the great rhetorical 'ideas' of a philosophical modernism get retrospectively and generally seen as so many 'soundbytes'.

Yet the outer shell of the form is here and preserved; and *Videodrome* carefully explains its 'themes' to us - the social perniciousness of television and mass culture generally, McLuhanite reflections on the physical changes and perceptual mutations involved in prolonged exposure to the new medium, even the old philosophical questions about the Good and whether the masses' cultural appetites automatically lead to them. These are all serious issues, with long and distinguished traditions of philosophical speculation and debate behind them; but who would wish to argue that *Videodrome* represents a serious

contribution to their development? . . . My sense is that in the new dimensionality of postmodern cultural space, ideas of the older conceptual type have lost their autonomy and become something like by-products and after-images flung up on the screen of the mind and of social production by the culturalization of daily life. The dissolution of philosophy today then reflects this modification in the status of ideas (and ideology), which itself retroactively unmasks any number of traditional philosophical concepts as having been just such consciousness-symptoms all the while, that could not be identified as such in the culturally impoverished, pre-media and residually 'natural' human societies or (modes of production) of the past (*The Geopolitical Aesthetic* 25)

One of postmodernism's ritual reflexes then is this tacit or not so tacit repudiation of the older ideologemes, a public flogging of the master-narrative, of the philosophical idea or value system. This is consistent with the crisis in legitimacy of the metanarratives that Lyotard addresses in *The Postmodern Condition*. Jameson goes on to show how *Videodrome*'s "remarkable political polysemousness [is due] to the space freed by the end of traditional ideas, concepts and themes" (29), how it acts as a multiply-productive signifier or semiotic configuration.

A similar kind of post-philosophical polysemousness, a layering of the incommensurable ideologemes of modernity, can be observed in *Blade Runner*, where it is not so much a hotchpotch of first-level or basic *signifiers* (where we rather have a fairly stable opposition between the obvious signs of 'Replicant' and 'human') so much as their *signifieds*, themselves reduced to a series of second-level *signifiers*, that seem to provide the inconsistency and heterogeneity that Jameson identifies. This second-level of meaning allows the signifier 'Replicant' to resignify the ideologemes or signifiers of 'artificial intelligence', 'slave', 'hunter' consecutively, in different scenarios or scenes, yet also simultaneously, accumulating these meanings as the whole story mutates. What the Replicants actually 'mean' seems to metamorphosize or hallucinate as the ghost of one philosophical ideologeme takes over from another, the fantasy of reconciliation receding and emerging against that of revolution, and that of sadism. In what could be seen as a ritualistic and mocking parade of the pompous past of ideas, the unmasking of the *materiality* of these now obviously ideological constructions, the Replicant figure constantly exudes mutating connotation-signs, so that the *ressentiment* of Nietzsche, or, to revert to our previous example, his philosophy of cruelty is thus morphed cartoon-style (a hallucinogenic special effects of the ideologeme) into an older Christian or Kantian moral scenario.

Revisiting the chase scene provides a concrete example of this process of combining the incommensurable, where in the climax of the movie, we see the last lean Replicant, Roy Batty, chasing an inferior Deckard around and on top of Sebastian's apartment block. We have already commented on the "overman" signification, but here we can also see Nietzsche's virtue of 'cruelty' coming to the fore in the very dynamics of the hunt:

One should open one's eyes and take a new look at cruelty; one should at last grow impatient, so that the kind of immodest fat errors which have, for example, been fostered by tragedy by ancient and modern philosophers should no longer go stalking virtuously and confidently about. Almost everything we call 'higher culture' is based on the spiritualisation and intensification of *cruelty* - this is my proposition; the 'wild beast' has not yet been laid to rest at all, it lives, it flourishes, it has merely become - deified. That which constitutes the painful voluptuousness of tragedy is cruelty; that which produces a pleasing effect in so-called tragic pity, indeed fundamentally in everything sublime up to the highest and most refined thrills of metaphysics, derives its sweetness solely from the ingredients of cruelty mixed in with it. What the Roman in the arena, the Christian in the ecstasies of the Cross, the Spaniard watching burnings or bullfights, the Japanese of today crowding in to the tragedy, the Parisian suburban workman who has a nostalgia for bloody revolutions . . . - what all of these enjoy and look with secret ardour to imbibe is the spicy potion of the great Circe 'cruelty'" (*Beyond Good and Evil* 159).

What this passage asserts is not only that the cruelty of the predatory 'wild beast' is something to be admired, but that it already surreptitiously provides the basis of many voyeuristic pleasures; in fact it appears to be the essential mechanism of drama, spectacle, religious excitement, and, we might add, cinema. According to this Nietzschean reading, when Batty breaks Deckard's fingers during the hunt he exemplifies the virtue of cruelty; one approves of this 'sporting chance' he gives both himself and Deckard, and at the same time enjoys the pain inflicted on the latter, the 'wild beast' toying with its prey (with Deckard's shooting-hand gone the struggle turns into fight between a naturally stronger predator and weaker, damaged prey). Batty's blood-sport is the surge of the bullfighter, the executioner, the revolutionary, and ours of the Roman spectator. This celebration of the beast's power and cruelty can include self-inflicted pain, as Nietzsche maintains that "there is also an abundant, over-abundant enjoyment of one's own suffering, of making oneself suffer - and wherever man allows himself to be persuaded to self-denial in the *religious* sense, or to self-mutilation, . . . he is secretly lured and urged onward by his cruelty, by the dangerous thrills of cruelty directed *against himself*" (*Beyond Good and Evil* 159-60). In *Blade Runner*, this modulation in the cruelty theme occurs when Batty indulges in "self-mutilation", piercing his own hand, and the spectator registers (possibly with pleasurable respect, or at least fascination) the undecidable agony-ecstasy one associates with the masochist - additionally the Christian resonance recalls the primitive collective sacrificial ecstasy at the individual agony of the crucifixion, which Nietzsche discerns as the same pleasure mechanism.

If this section has and constitutes a dominant Nietzschean ideologeme, the hunt as protonarrative, the value or virtue of 'cruelty', then a rapid change takes place when Deckard is finally rescued by Batty instead of being trashed (like the piece of junk he deserves to be treated as). Hanging off the side of a building, with the "overman" about to finish him off, Deckard is a gonner. Suddenly



the aesthetic of cruelty and its teleology of death modulates into the Kantian *Weltaunshaung*, respect for human life and freedom as an 'end in itself' etc., and the beast turns into the proverbial lamb. The ambivalence and ambiguity of affective charge attached to the figure of the Replicants discerned earlier can therefore be reinterpreted from the space of postmodernism as both the 'waning of affect', and the waning of the value-effect of the concept; the text becomes a coalescence of ideologemes, a veritable philosophical scrapyard, in which a whole history of thoughts on - and fantasies of - freedom and oppression is contained and alluded to, but vaguely, ironically, without rigour or commitment or preference. Indeed from this vantage point the comical wind-up 'clock-work Prussian-ness' suggested by the goose-stepping and diminutive toy-soldier that Sebastian (the designer's name alluding to the classical ideologeme of 'genius') has bio-engineered to keep him company, along with its literal 'constructedness', seem now more generally to ridicule the Age of Reason, and to figuratively mock the "ideas of the older type [which have] lost their autonomy", as Jameson puts it.

It then remains to resurrect one last ghostly philosophical signifier from the hologramatic text of *Blade Runner*, one which doesn't manifest itself as narrative, which precedes the great dramas of the dialectic - the original pure fantasy signifier of the individual automaton. In this early anticipation of the human-machine in Descartes' 'Discourse on Method' we can see the prototype of the later yet related figure of the android or cyborg which will get deployed in the philosophies and fantasies (or ideologemes as we know see them) of freedom. Here in Descartes we see the very beginnings of the generic science-fiction fascination with the problematic of 'Artificial Intelligence', or on a deeper level the dilemmas and problems attending recognition of the Other consciousness, the dialogical voices of class and ethnicity etc.

Nor will this appear at all strange to those who are acquainted with the variety of movements performed by the different automata, or moving machines fabricated by human industry, and that with help of but few pieces compared with the great multitude of bones, muscles, nerves, arteries, veins and other parts that are found in the body of each animal. Such persons will look upon this body as a machine made by the hands of God, which is incomparably better arranged, and adequate to movements more admirable than is any machine of human intervention. And here I specially stayed to show that, were there such machines exactly resembling in organs and outward form an ape or any other irrational animal, we could have no means of knowing that they were in any respect of a different nature from these animals; *but if there were machines bearing the image of our bodies, and capable of imitating our actions as far as it is morally possible, there would still remain two tests whereby to know that they were not therefore really men.* [my italics] Of these the first is that they could never use words or other signs arranged in such a manner as is competent to us in order to declare our thoughts to others: for we may easily conceive a machine to be so constructed that it emits vocables, and even that it

emits some correspondent to the action upon it of external objects which cause a change in its organs; for example, if touched in a particular place it may demand what we wish to say to it; if in another it may cry out that it is hurt, and such like; but not that it should arrange them variously so as appositely to reply to what is said in its presence, as men of the lowest grade of intellect can do. The second test is that although such machines might execute many things with equal or perhaps greater perfection than any of us, they would without doubt fail in certain others from which it could be discovered that they did not act from knowledge, but solely from the disposition of their organs: for while reason is a universal instrument that is alike available on every occasion, these organs on the contrary, need a particular arrangement for each particular action; whence it must be morally impossible that there should exist in any machine a diversity of organs sufficient to enable it to act in all the occurrences of life, in the way in which our reason enables us to act. (*Discourse on Method* 45)

At this fascinating juncture in his *Discourse* Descartes seems to anticipate or prefigure, not just the central thematic dynamic of cyberpunk and cybernetic fiction (and possibly even more generally extrapolative science-fiction) but quite specifically the Replicants' quest for recognition in *Blade Runner*. Apart from its dialogue with this fictional space it also seems to herald the various 'real' reason-tests of modernity, the confession-based 'talking cures' and medico-juridical examinations and interrogations that Foucault unmasks as the strategically unified normalising discourse on Otherness and deviance. Descartes seems, in the 'first test' of syntactical construction, to put faith in the *inability* of an imaginary cyborg or machine to reach the state of discursive competence, and the *ability* of a power-knowledge apparatus (the test of reason itself) to measure and disqualify this bogus consciousness should it so emerge to contest its legitimacy. In *Blade Runner* this test resurfaces in the Voigt-Kampff test, which no longer tests reason but emotion or empathy<sup>26</sup>; but crucially the actual stakes remain the same, the exclusion of the non-human. In both the Voigt-Kampff test and the larger thematic antimony of the body-types the film seems to allude to Descartes' antiquated problematic of the definition of 'the human' and its differentiation from the Otherness of the merely machinic. Here the vaguely Nazi-ish connotations of the teutonic "Kampff", reinforcing the more obvious 'eugenics' allusion, are presumably supposed to show up the genocidal tendencies of an instrumental reason lacking all empathy itself. This rewrite or reversal of the Cartesian text is overtly evident - in the opening shots of the film, where the test is being applied to the panicky Leon, the archaic, cumbersome and conspicuous test-apparatus (which works to register pupil contraction and dilation) unmistakably

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<sup>26</sup> The 'psychological' test is used to sift Replicants out from authentic humans, copies from the original, so that they can be "retired". David Desser explains the mechanism of the test in 'Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep': "basically, the test measures involuntary responses to questions about the killing of animal or human life. Although androids "surpassed several classes of human specials in terms of intelligence", they do not respond empathetically" (194).

signifies “mechanism”, a literalisation of Descartes’ metaphor, “instrument” of reason; and its passive object, the quivering biological eye, is rendered “organism”<sup>27</sup>. And of course the ‘object’ Leon’s behaviour would appear to be a lot more emotional, and therefore more human (even though Leon is a Replicant) than the clinical, bureaucratic ‘subject’ (but presumably authentic human) administering the test. Ridley Scott’s postmodern pastiche then seems somehow additionally to quote (even if it is disapprovingly), this ‘original’ raw material of ideologemes to follow, a philosophical ‘primal scene’, and yet another fantasy signifier is added to our multi-layered yet depthless hologram of philosophical ideologemes.

One might question how a fantasy of the individual body-machine meets Jameson’s criterion of a class fantasy, which is “not a mere reflex or reduplication of its situational context, but as the imaginary resolution of the objective contradictions to which it thus constitutes an active response” (118). Here the ideologeme is not so much an imaginary or fantasy resolution of specific class or social contradictions as a containment of the radical, polyvalent questions of difference and simulation themselves as they begin to manifest themselves (how in this modernising and differing world to treat the Other who *appears* human and unique: the madman, the worker, the criminal, woman, the savage etc.): ‘we will be able to identify and contain Otherness’. In addition it would appear that Descartes’ machine-human opposition is the allegorical key for the more specific Enlightenment narrative of emancipation we have discussed, one of the central tropes by which the deeper narrative of collective and minority freedoms are thought in modernity, and thus functions as ideologeme in this ordinary way as well.

## JAMESON’S THEORY OF POSTMODERNISM

Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies.

Adorno & Horkheimer, ‘The Culture Industry’

The following section attempts to focus on certain aspects of Jameson’s theory of postmodernism which are relevant to my broader discussion of the representation of technology and the machine in the new interpretative frame of the postmodern age. Jameson’s overall method is particularly useful in that it enables comparison and dialogue with the past; he is thus able to look at how an omnipotent Nature in the older experience of the sublime modulates into Technology, how Modernist representations of external, visible energy of the power-technology of the day are thwarted in the internal secretiveness of the computer. Additionally, in looking through the closer frame of

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<sup>27</sup> In a strange postmodern modulation of ‘the test’ we find that “eye movement dysfunction” becomes the sign by which a schizophrenic can be *detected*: “Eye movement dysfunction may be a trait marker for schizophrenia, since it is independent of drug treatment and clinical state” (*Kaplan and Sadock’s Synopsis of Psychiatry* 468).

Jameson's postmodernism, we don't altogether lose the issues or ideas of modernity; as the preceding section has attempted to show, they rather become democratised, internalised, commodified, and ultimately trivialised. The kind of temporal and sociological framework my analysis is predicated on borrows heavily from Jameson's periodisation of modernisation or capitalism, which emphasises continuity at the expense of rupture, choosing to see difference within sameness rather than the other way round. Postmodernism (as opposed to postmodernity) is seen as a transformation *within* the larger processes of (cultural) modernity, (social) modernisation, and (economic) capitalism. In fact one could read Jameson's essay 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' as a rhetorical bid to appropriate the treasured 'postmodernism' sign, an attempt to wrest a use-value out of its layers of packaging, a useful meaning for a Marxist language threatened by the increasing exchange-value of theories of postindustrialism.

The intention behind the title of his essay would therefore seem to be: even if this concept is itself suspect, let us make it work for us. But it would also be unfair to say that Jameson just uses a popular 'media' concept to recount a vulgar economic determinism, and his elaborate treatment of history as the 'absent cause' (always already, to a degree, narrativised) in *The Political Unconscious* is ample evidence that this is not another simplistic base-superstructure model. One of the fascinating things about his theory is its assimilation of a whole range of cultural and media theories on the present, from McLuhan to Baudrillard, and its integration with a more historically-rooted explanatory model. We should see it as a singular and important intervention in a intellectual debate dominated by post-Marxist and neoconservative excitement at the end of history and emergence of a new post-industrial or information age. In this millenarian excitement the older debates and the stakes are thrown aside as anachronistic: classes don't exist any more, industrial production has ended, the masses have chosen the market system, etc. Jameson offers a way of thinking the present as a purer form of capitalism, a different mode of explanation from the immediately 'visual' apocalypses and new ages of the ecstatic sociologies, which tend to *represent* their object rather than *think* it. Although the major focus is on the historically new position of the figure of technology in what is discerned as the postmodern sublime, I want to precede this with an examination of Jameson's assimilation and diagnosis of a range of 'consumer culture' theories and their preoccupations with liberating or alienating effects of a new technological culture on humanity, and secondly, with a discussion of the problematic interpretation of a new "schizophrenic" subjectivity.

### **The Culture of the Simulacrum, or, Technology as 'The Evil Demon of Images':**

Jameson's logic involves the initial establishment of a cultural dominant of surface image and depthlessness, in which both the real or referent and history are banished or rendered inaccessible - this hegemony of spatiality leads to a weakening and erosion of both private and public temporalities, and the breakdown of individual and collective history is what constitutes the schizophrenic present of

postmodernism. In this new regime of the sign one of the strongest formal characteristics is “a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense” (‘Postmodernism’ 9), and the example deployed to illustrate this is Andy Warhol’s disconnected, self-sufficient and autoreferential art ‘texts’ which can’t be made to reveal anything like a larger context or referential world, to which one might expect them to stand in metonymic relation. Jameson sees this art’s resistance to interpretation as more than just a change at the level of artistic style; the refusal or inability to speak of what is presented is rather the reflection of a more fundamental change in the ‘object world’ of late capitalism itself and in the perceiving postmodern subject - if anything Warhol’s art seems to speak quite cryptically about this essentially unrepresentable social mutation, “explicitly foreground[ing] the commodity fetishism of a transition to late capital” (9). This all serves to substantiate his earlier point “that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally” (4). In a kind of infinite internal regress this brand of postmodern pop art merely blandly reflects its own superficiality and complicity with the economic order, but without differentiating itself from this commodification.

Related to this are other formal features that Jameson identifies, the ‘waning of affect’ (which will be discussed further when treating the concept of schizophrenia) and ‘pastiche’, the random raiding and “cannibalisation” of past styles and aesthetic codes without any sense of centredness or the norm, or an authentically personal style. Eventually, via pastiche, Jameson comes to describe this transformed culture and society as one predicated on consumption of self-images; pastiche, as the insatiable desire for dead codes, is related to an “addiction - with a whole historically original consumers’ appetite for a world transformed into sheer images of itself and for pseudo events and “spectacles” (the term of the Situationists)” (‘Postmodernism’ 18). It is here that he strangely enough doesn’t mention the thought of Jean Baudrillard, whose work seems centred on the following concept - instead Jameson seems paradoxically to attribute its ‘originality’ to Plato: “It is for such objects that we may reserve Plato’s conception of the “simulacrum”, the identical copy for which no original copy has ever existed. Appropriately enough, the culture of the simulacrum comes to life in a society where exchange value has generalised to the point at which the very memory of use value is effaced, a society of which Guy Debord has observed, in an extraordinary phrase, that in it “ ‘the image has become the final form of commodity reification’ (*The Society of the Spectacle*)” (18). The various real voices of history, of past generations and societies (a narrative-temporal tradition) have been reduced to (visual-spatial) “a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum” (18).

Jameson’s conceptualisation of ‘the culture of the simulacrum’ as a gluttonous consumption of images bears more than a family resemblance to Baudrillard’s more manic and dramatic revelations on the same subject. In *The Evil Demon of Images* Baudrillard articulates a similar view of the contemporary cultural system of industrialised societies, where the vice takes on a slightly different taint:

A *propos* the cinema and images in general (media images, technological images), I would like to conjure up the perversity of the relation between the image and the referent, the supposed real; the virtual and irreversible confusion of the sphere of images and the sphere of a reality whose nature we are less and less able to grasp. There are many modalities of this absorption, this confusion, this diabolical seduction of images. Above all it is the reference principle of images which must be doubted, this strategy by means of which they always appear to refer to a real world, to real objects, and to reproduce something which is logically and chronologically anterior to themselves. None of this is true. As simulacra, images precede the real to the extent that they invert the causal and logical order of the real and its reproduction.. Benjamin, in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", already pointed out strongly this modern revolution in the order of production (of reality, of meaning) by the precession, the anticipation of meaning (13)

In this mood we find Baudrillard caught in something of a diabolical bind himself, on the one hand raging with full biblical fervour against the perversion, distortion and disappearance of a genuine real, "a reality whose nature we are less and less able to grasp", and on the other hand proposing the radical negation of the possibility of a representable reality, when "reproduction" always precedes the real (the realm of production). This becomes more obvious a bit further on, when he corrects himself : "they [images] only seem to resemble things, to resemble reality, events, faces. Or rather they do conform, but their conformity is diabolical" (*Evil Demon of Images* 14). Here an earlier Marxist voice denounces the way our new visual systems of representation in their intensity seem to drown out the real as narrative, history, as economic structure or organisation, while another more solipsistic voice impotently registers the superficial yet lived reality and inescapability of projected and manufactured meanings<sup>28</sup>. In his title Baudrillard seems to be alluding to Descartes' evil demon, who could, hypothetically speaking, mislead the perceiving subject into erroneously believing in a seemingly empirical reality by providing him with a kind of 'false consciousness' of a hallucinatory order. But in this reference, which connects postmodern technologies of image production with this obviously illusory demon of 'manipulation', there is the ironic sense that this demonising isn't that serious, that there isn't really a conspiratorial centre to the network, a controlling elite using the media for disguising the real. The title and tone of the essay (an overly prescriptive and condemnatory language) campily suggests that almost ludicrously ineffectual position of the biblical prophet, who in his conservatism denounces the cultural dominant to deaf ears.

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<sup>28</sup> In some ways this partial acceptance of the validity of 'ideology', as a lived reality or conformity, parallels Raymond Williams' insistence on the necessity of a more affirmative or inclusive concept of 'hegemony': "Hegemony is then not only the articulate upper level of 'ideology', nor are its forms of control only those seen as 'manipulation or 'indoctrination'. . . It is a lived system of meaning and values - constitutive and constituting - which as they are experienced as practices appear reciprocally confirming" (*Marxism & Literature* 110).

Baudrillard's assault on postmodern representation and reality-effect comes out more decisively in 'Simulacra and Simulations', where he posits the concept of *simulation* as a way of conceiving the sign diametrically opposed to that of *representation*. Where in representation the sign is guaranteed some kind of exchangeability for the real, simulation is founded on the foreclosure of its referential value, it becomes the real: "Representation starts from the principle that the sign and the real are equivalent . . . simulation starts . . . *from the radical negation of the sign as value*" ('Simulacra and Simulations' 152). Simulation gradually takes over representation in a journey of the image through four modes of *reproduction*, from where it simply reflects a reality, to where it disguises a reality, to where it hides the absence of a reality, and finally to the culture of the simulacrum in which "it bears no relation to any reality whatsoever" (153). What Baudrillard doesn't explicitly explain here is what causes this gradual transformation of the semiotic regime or cultural space<sup>29</sup>; it would appear to be historically contingent on the quality and quantity of the image-production technology of a given mode of production. Presumably we are still stuck in the third stage of trying desperately to avoid what we have somehow already internalised on some level : that reality, as something preceding representation, is no longer there. This seems evidenced by Baudrillard's reading of the presumably contemporary nostalgia phenomenon - and this specific feature of the culture of the simulacrum is something which Jameson's postmodernism also elaborates, cementing the connection with Jameson. "When reality is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality, of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity" ('Simulacra and Simulations' 153). While Baudrillard seems to see this as the symptom of the general evacuation of the real, Jameson reads this more specifically as a 'crisis of historicity': "the remarkable current intensification of the addiction to the photographic image is itself a tangible symptom of an omnipresent , omnivorous and well-nigh libidinal historicism" ('Postmodernism' 12). In a viciously hungry circle, the vacuum left by a dead past requires substitution or simulation, a process which only serves to further exacerbate the desire for authenticity.

Here we might recall Theodore Adorno, a major influence on Jameson, who anticipates Baudrillard's full-blown diagnosis of "panic-stricken production of the real" ('Simulacra and Simulations' 153). In lamenting the inauthenticity of the deployment of the concept of authenticity Adorno returns to the classic analysis of commodity fetishism that manifests itself in Marx's *Capital*, and the illusory foundation of gold on which capitalism bases its logic is re-revealed.

The fraud of genuineness goes back to bourgeois blindness to the exchange process.

Genuine things are those to which commodities and means of exchange can be reduced, particularly gold. But like gold, genuineness, abstracted as the proportion of fine metal,

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<sup>29</sup> Although he does seem to point to it in the previous instance we looked at - "... technical images, whether they be from photography, cinema or television, are in the overwhelming majority more 'figurative', 'realist', than all the images from past. It is in its resemblance, not only analogical but technological, that the image is most immoral and most perverse" ('Simulacra and Simulations' 14).

becomes a fetish. Both are treated as if they were the foundation, which in reality is a social relation, while gold and genuineness precisely express only the fungibility, the comparability of things; it is they that are not in-themselves, but for-others. The unguineness of the genuine stems from its need to claim, in a society dominated by exchange, to be what it stands for yet is never able to be. The apostles of genuineness, in the service of the power that now masters circulation, dignify the demise of the latter with the dance of the money veils (*Minima Moralia* [paragraph 99] 155)

Just before this passage he has suggested that generalised commodity production has itself manufactured and marketed the concept of authenticity for humans as the antithetical and distracting other of reifications and the standardisation of things. "The more tightly the world is enclosed by the net of man-made things, the more stridently those who are responsible for this condition proclaim their natural primitiveness" (155). Mass-production has fostered the importance or significance of 'uniqueness'. "Only when the countless standardized commodities project, for the sake of profit, the illusion of being unique does the idea take shape, as their antithesis yet in keeping with the same criteria, that the non-reproducible is the truly genuine" (155). Of course this echoes the central thematic problematic in *Blade Runner* (not to mention more generally science-fiction's obsessional *leitmotiv* of artificial intelligence and its attendant problems): the genuineness or authenticity of the Replicants' experience is unshakeably existent, even more intense and real than the drab space the humans find themselves in, even though it turns out that their memories are false, that their bodies are synthetically produced.

What Adorno does is historicise the concepts of ethical authenticity, genuineness and originality and show how they don't make the same kind of sense in a pre-industrial culture. "Previously, the question of authenticity was undoubtedly as little asked of intellectual products as that of originality, a concept unknown in Bach's era" (*Minima Moralia* 155). Adorno's thoughts ring true when we think of the postmodern advertising campaign and its extension of the 'authenticity' concept to the object world of products, around the brand name and logo: it hypes its product's originality and authenticity by warning against imitations and inferior replications. The pirate product, that which simulates a 'branded' product, serves to bolster or reinforce the illusory quality of genuineness Adorno illustrates - a differential or negative value appears as a positive thing-in-itself (a *noumenon*), an essence.

Of course Baudrillard, who emerged out of the Situationist work on consumer society, owes - with regard to his work on the technologies of simulation - a fair amount of credit to arch-Situationist Guy Debord, whom Jameson *does* mention as an influence on his own thought<sup>30</sup>. Debord's analysis of consumer society is derived from a Hegelian-Marxist viewpoint, one which responds negatively to a

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<sup>30</sup> Jameson quotes Debord's "extraordinary phrase", 'the image has become the final form of commodity reification' from *Society of the Spectacle*.



spectacular society effecting the complete paralysis of any possibility of collective praxis. His strange little book offers a number of extremely evasive if not opaque definitions of the modern 'spectacle', which seem, in their shifting plurality, to work against what is held to be capital's present strategy of visualising society - to give too clear a representation of the thoroughly evil spectacle would be doing its work for it, or at least promoting its logic of making things *apparent* (that is reifying social relations)<sup>31</sup>. As in Baudrillard, the new technologies of representation, the mass media, play a constitutive role in derealising society, turning lived process into spectacle.

The spectacle is the existing order's uninterrupted discourse about itself, its laudatory monologue. It is the self-portrait of power in the epoch of its totalitarian management of the conditions of existence. The fetishistic, purely objective appearance of spectacular relations conceals the fact that they are relations among men and classes: a second nature with its fatal flaws seems to dominate our environment. But the spectacle is not the necessary product of technical development seen as a *natural* development. The society of the spectacle is on the contrary the form which chooses its own technical content. If the spectacle, taken in the limited sense of "mass media" which are its most glaring superficial manifestation, seems to invade society as mere equipment, this equipment is in no way neutral but is the very means suited to its total self-movement. (*Society of the Spectacle*)

Apart from the fairly conventional elaboration of a theory of ideology as the fixed 'naturalisation' of a fluid arbitrary or socially-constructed language and world, Debord innovatively sees the very form and structure of these technologies of one-way communication as isolating and alienating in their effects on the already passive consumer-subject. Communication technology is intentionally designed around the principles of mass stimulation and manipulation, and as he reveals below, is controlled by and for capital. As we shall see shortly this view of 'the content of form' is similar to McLuhan's credo, 'the medium is the message'. Debord continues:

If the social needs of the epoch in which such techniques are developed can only be satisfied through their mediation, if the administration of this society and all contact among men can no longer take place except through the intermediary of this instantaneous communication, it is because this "communication" is *unilateral*. The concentration of "communication" is thus an accumulation, in the hands of the existing system's administration, of the means which allow it to carry on this particular administration. The generalized cleavage of the spectacle is inseparable from the modern State, namely from

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<sup>31</sup> This would appear to be evidenced by a remark at the end of the book: "The critical concept of spectacle can undoubtedly also be vulgarized into a commonplace hollow formula of sociologico-political rhetoric to explain and abstractedly denounce everything, and thus serves as a defense of the spectacular system. It is obvious that no idea can lead beyond the existing spectacle, but only beyond the existing ideas about the spectacle. To effectively destroy the society of the spectacle, what is needed is men putting a practical force into action." (paragraph 203)

the general form of cleavage within society, the product of the division of social labour and the organ of class domination (*Society of the Spectacle*, paragraph 24).

Communication in the society of the spectacle is thus the unabashed appropriation and confiscation of the means of mediation and praxis, of intersubjective language, by the deployment of the mass media, the machine-language of the administrators. With this inhuman, malignant growth of the society of the spectacle “all community and critical sense are dissolved” in a process which gathers its own momentum, when humans become automata and machines seem to do the talking. The spectacle openly displays its autonomy as “separate power developing in itself, in the growth of productivity by means of the incessant refinement of the division of labour into a parcellization of gestures which are then dominated by the independent movement of machines” (paragraph 25).

If Baudrillard and Debord exist as the fine French pedigree Jameson is willing to concede as influences on his theory of technology-centred postmodernism, there also exists another class of American and mainstream media theorists (or perhaps we should say writers) who aren't as openly manifested in his essay. I am referring to the popular media theories that Jameson refers disparagingly to in the beginning of his essay as those ‘ideological’ sociologies which “bring us the news of . . . a whole new type of society, most famously baptized “postindustrial society” [Daniel Bell] but often also designated consumer society, media society, information society, electronic society or high tech and the like” (‘Postmodernism’ 3). Alongside the more polished, academic and ideologically threatening research of Bell one finds the popular futurists like Marshall McLuhan and Alvin Toffler. These ‘common’ or popular cultural theories are implicated as similarly and simply ideological in their unwitting and ‘religious’ contribution to a larger intentional strategy of challenging the adequacy of Marxist discourse to explain the new socio-economic order. The suggestion here is that Jameson’s theorisation of the culture of the simulacrum is critical of yet also informed or shaped at some level by this larger body of writing on the new ‘world’, whether it be the “swirling phantasmagoria” of Toffler’s ‘Third Wave infosphere’ (*The Third Wave* 169) or McLuhan’s musings on the thrills and dangers of technologies as the ‘extensions of man’<sup>32</sup>. If we look closer at the theories themselves we find similarities, for example, between Jameson and McLuhan in the theme of a human body compelled to mutate to meet the new technological environment. Jameson suggests that the human subject is not yet ready for postmodern space: “The newer architecture therefore - like many of the other cultural products I have evoked in the preceding remarks - stands as something like an imperative to grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions (‘Postmodernism’ 39). This seems to be reminiscent of McLuhan’s metaphor, that “today, after more than a century of electric technology we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace abolishing space and time as far as our planet is concerned”

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<sup>32</sup> “Our mechanical technologies for extending and separating the functions of our physical beings have brought us near to a state of disintegration by putting us out of touch with ourselves” (*Understanding Media* 105)

(*Understanding Media* 19). Even more closely McLuhan prefigures Jameson's analogy down to the mutation of "new organs", declaring that "electromagnetic technology requires utter human docility and quiescence of meditation such as befits an organism that now wears its brain outside its skull and its nerves outside its hide" (*Understanding Media* 64). Additionally Jameson's call for a 'cognitive mapping' of our real relations to the global system, seem to echo, apart from the explicit Althusserian model of ideology, a suggestion one finds in McLuhan, where he discerns the need for a global consciousness and 'conscience' - "An external consensus or conscience is now as necessary as private consciousness" (64-5). Elsewhere McLuhan suggests that "today, when we have extended all parts of our bodies and senses by technology, we are haunted by the need for an outer consensus of technology and experience that would raise our communal lives to the level of a world-wide consensus" (*Understanding Media* 105-6). To a lesser degree even the hyperbolic style of Toffler's pronouncements on the new order, the "Third Wave infosphere", seem to affect Jameson's occasional rhetorical excesses about the 'Third machine age'. This is entirely consistent with Jameson's own theory of postmodernism as a barrage of infectious styles and codes which erode earlier Modern assumptions of personal style, originality and access to a 'pure' referent, whether it be a past History or the very 'presence' of the present, postmodernism.

### **The schizophrenic subject**

In Jameson we see a contradiction or at least an ambiguity or ambivalence concerning the emergence of schizophrenia as a cultural dominant: schizophrenia is used as both a formal explanation of high-cultural authorial experimentation, and as a structural understanding of mass consumption - in his theorisation this possibly latent ambivalence isn't explicitly or consciously elaborated, and manifests itself in at least two contradictory 'stereotypes' or poles of psychiatric schizophrenia: paranoia and catatonia. With regard to the former both the anxiety and the *active* paranoid constructions, projections and conspiracies of the cyberpunk sub-genre are heralded and celebrated, and offered as an example of the still forthcoming 'political' form of postmodernism, while the more *passive* variety of schizophrenia, which one might correlate with the catatonic species, is seen in a negative light. The hedonistic state of the postmodern subject, consuming as opposed to working, watching instead of acting is castigated, and is captured in the withering denunciation of an imbecilic indiscrimination towards sensory input: "the ideal schizophrenic, indeed, is easy enough to please provided only an eternal present is thrust before the eyes, which gaze with equal fascination on an old shoe or the tenaciously growing organic mystery of the human toenail" ('Postmodernism' 10). In Jameson's tone above one finds a paradoxical synthesis of Daniel Bell's conservative outrage at the fantasy-orientated and anti-work Modernist sentiment saturating and threatening the social domain, and at the other extreme, Guy Debord's indignant and radical analysis of the society of the spectacle and its induction of a state of generalised political paralysis. This catatonia is the subject's lack of temporal

direction, caught in the eternal 'present' of the simulacrum, a semiotic flux of distractions which disorientate and produce amnesia. The sense of the loss of the real and of continuity (History) is only half-remembered, and ironically commodified, in the nostalgia product.

But how does one deal with the treatment of these two species of schizophrenia, which Jameson never delineates as such? Should one accept the contradiction as coextensive with Jameson's explicit aim mentioned elsewhere of thinking capitalism 'dialectically', "to think this development positively and negatively all at one [...] as catastrophe and progress altogether" ('Postmodernism' 47)? Nowhere in his essay does Jameson treat the differences and contradictions of the medical taxonomy of schizophrenia, although there are a number of effects he describes which correlate to different 'subtypes'. The Paranoid Type, according to the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic bible, *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV)*, corresponds to Jameson's affirmative analysis of the postmodern sublime, to the "high-tech paranoia" thematic of cyberpunk. "The essential feature of the Paranoid Type of Schizophrenia is the presence of prominent delusions or auditory hallucinations in the context of a relative preservation of cognitive functioning and affect" (*DSM-IV* 287). On the other hand Jameson's 'waning of affect' and 'fragmentation' seem to bear witness to some of the criteria of the Disorganized Type, "disorganized speech, disorganized behaviour, and flat or inappropriate affect" (287). The last trait is explained: "the disorganized speech may be accompanied by silliness and laughter that are not closely related to the content of the speech" (287-8). 'Pastiche', the "cannibalisation" of past styles, echoes the "echolalia" of the Catatonic type, which is "the pathological and parrot-like, and apparently senseless repetition of a word just spoken by another person", and to a degree the related "echopraxia", "the repetitive imitation of the movements of another person...stereotypies, mannerisms, and automatic obedience or mimicry" (288). The Catatonic "motoric immobility" or "stupor" (289) additionally exemplifies the Debord-shaded inactivity of the postmodern spectator, frozen by the spatiality of the culture of the image. Blithely incorporating these incommensurables or extremes, schizophrenia appears in Jameson's essay as the unproblematic problem of postmodernism, the unified state and dominant illness or etiology of commodity culture, or a *zeitgeist*, tolerating no internal contradictions.

The actual connection with or relation to what schizophrenia normally means in a clinical sense is never actually explored, except vaguely and analogically in the reference to a Lacanian theory of breakdown and psychosis. The Paranoid Schizophrenia of the cyberpunk sub-culture would then have to be considered as a kind of counter-schizophrenic force in Jameson's schema, actively working from *within*, constructing patterns and tracing conspiracies, all towards regaining a cognitive hold on the world and our positions within it. The following section attempts to thresh out some of the problems and confusion surrounding Jameson's often vague and contradictory conceptualisations of schizophrenia as a model for postmodern aesthetics.

The theorisation of a schizophrenic 'present' is quite a serious and important feature of Jameson's theory of postmodernism, and although I hope to demonstrate its limitations, inaccuracy and *inconsistency* as a label attempting to bring together various very different uses of the term, I also want to argue for its usefulness and continued relevance, after articulating the poles and gradations it contains, as a concept for *evaluation*. Jameson's paradigm of schizophrenia seems to be a synthesis of various theories, and exists in his essay as the total 'effect' of various aspects or characteristics of postmodernism. Initially he discusses the move from an emotional or psychological experiential tone of 'anxiety' to that of 'schizophrenia' with the emergence of postmodernism - whereas 'expression', requiring the differentiation between inside and outside of an ego or subjectivity, was still possible in the earlier cultural moment, the newer space seems to erode the difference, and both 'expression' and 'the subject' are casualties. Here Jameson's style seem to be speculative and impressionistic; he doesn't bother to go into the mechanics of the metamorphosis, drawing most of his evidence from a few paintings and a vague generalisation about the sixties ("the notorious cases of burnout and self-destruction of the ending 1960s, and the great dominant experiences of drugs and schizophrenia" ['Postmodernism' 14]). The main feature of postmodernism he addresses here is the death of the subject, which appears to be the consequence of the French pronouncement of the death of the author. At this juncture he would thus appear to be influenced by influential yet academic essays, like Foucault's 'What is an Author?', which had already declared the end of expression, the inside/outside opposition, and the author or 'writing subject' (somewhat optimistically):

we can say that today's writing has freed itself from the dimension of expression. Referring only to itself, but without being restricted to the confines of its interiority, writing is identified with its own unfolded exteriority. . . . In writing, the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin the subject within language; it is rather a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears ('What is an Author?' 198).

The problem with this absorption of Foucault is that the latter is writing about innovations in Modernist 'writing', as *avante garde* art, literature as a 'high' cultural space outside of - and out of touch with - the field of mass culture; Jameson rearticulates as and expands to a 'cultural dominant' what is a hopeful diagnosis of a minor tangent (in Foucault and Barthes). It doesn't take much to persuade one that the American film industry is still firmly founded (and trades) on *auteur* theory.

Scott Durham, however, redeems Jameson somewhat by illustrating how the death of the subject exists not only as a 'literary' project, with its formal interest in authorial expression and autonomy, but as the dominant thematic of Philip K. Dick's oeuvre, and commits himself to "showing how he stages the death of the subject in terms of a radically contestatory politics of experience" ('P. K. Dick: From the Death of the Subject to a Theology of Late Capitalism' 173). He sees Dick as removed from the elite "high-cultural movements of the post World War Two period" and emblematic of an

everyday broadly based “counter-cultural” movement already on the wane from the 60s, and thus “it is perhaps by virtue of his very marginality with regard to high culture (as hegemonically defined) that Dick emerges as particularly symptomatic of the transformations that American culture has undergone with the emergence of late capitalism” (173). This “politics of experience” revolves around the central question of what it is to be a subject in this strange new ‘schizophrenic’ world in which culture is indistinguishable from commerce, and the field of desire is intensified to the point where the subject is unable to separate itself from the object-world. He analyses two different instances or “antagonistic tendencies” of this confusion or dissolution in Dick’s novels, where a subject’s boundaries are ‘exploded’ by desire to incorporate objects, and, the reverse, an experience of being invaded or colonised by a world of hostile subject-objects.

We are presented with desire’s unmediated investment of the everyday, a well-nigh schizoid experience .... In this first moment, the triumph of desire is total and its dissolving subject is paradoxically sovereign: it recreates its object as “benign entities” and traverses them “at will”. In the second moment, which Dick characteristically stages as the yearning of drug dependency, this “death” appears as an invasion of the subject by its objects and at the same time as the deterioration of that very power for desire’s “projection” that characterised that first moment: we are presented with a paranoid experience in which desire is immobilised, crushed and reduced to little more than a subordinate attribute of an “oppressive” object-world which seems to embody an unfamiliar and hostile subjectivity. Hence, the death of the subject is staged twice: first as an expansion of subjective powers in which desire is freed from its contemplative prison and immediately invests a complicit everyday, secondly, as the triumph over the subject of desire by a raw matter which seems paradoxically endowed with antagonistic subjectivity of its own (‘P. K. Dick: From the Death of the Subject to a Theology of Late Capitalism’ 176).

The distinction made here seems useful, as it strikes at the root of Jameson’s schizophrenic incorporation of assorted meanings of ‘schizophrenia’: even though a favourite refrain of his is that one must think culture or postmodernism dialectically, and not moralistically as good or bad, the essay, as has already been pointed out, seems to respond more positively to one ‘subtype’ of schizophrenia, while condemning another. In other words Jameson’s essay seems to be aware of these “antagonistic tendencies”, while not fully exploring or developing them.

Durham’s split, along with his initial analysis of ‘counter-culture’ can be traced back to Daniel Bell’s analysis of the emergence of a broad-based ‘counter-culture’ and a more traditionally elite ‘adversary’ culture, both of which emerge out of an anti-bourgeois Modernism and constitute unrealistic degrees of hedonism out of touch with the economic base. He sees a “a widening disjunction between the social structure ... and the culture, each of which is rooted by a different axial principle” (*The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* 477), where the culture is orientated around the self, while the

social structure is based on rationality or performativity. This split between the system's requirements and the culture is enhanced by capitalism itself: "in the organization of production and work itself, the system demands provident behaviour, industriousness and self-control, dedication to a career and success. In the realm of consumption, it fosters the attitude of *carpe diem*, prodigality and display, and the compulsive search for play" (478). This 'post-*Modernist*' culture is divided into two streams: one is more analytical and academic, the 'counter-culture' constitutes a challenge in terms of lifestyle, and extends 'freedom' and 'fantasy' to every facet of life.

These anti-bourgeois values, on the levels of ideology and consciousness, go hand in hand with the expansion of a new intellectual class, huge enough to sustain itself economically as a class, and with a new youth movement which seeks expression and self-definition in altered states of consciousness, cultural rebellion, and enormous personal freedom. What has emerged, coincident in time, is both an "adversary culture" and a "counter-culture" (479).

The "adversary culture" academics, Jameson and Durham, seem to express distaste or misgivings for this brand of 'naive' consumptive schizophrenia, a "counter-culture" resembling Catatonic and Disorganized Schizophrenia, and instead promote the more 'intelligent', analytical or 'organized' variety of schizophrenia, what Durham identifies above as the second moment, the "paranoid experience" which acknowledges the commodity system as other to the subject. In fact we see the paranoid type of schizophrenia above deconstructing the alien and alienated object-world of capitalism in a remarkably similar light to Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism in *Capital*.<sup>33</sup> Durham actually attempts to reposition Dick in his own "adversary culture", after initially situating him in the plebeian "counter-cultural" realm of "coffee-house metaphysics and dreams of conspiracy" ('P. K. Dick: From the Death of the Subject to a Theology of Late Capitalism' 173). While acknowledging the undecidability of Dick's "oscillation" of the "desiring subject from absolute sovereignty to absolute abjection" (176) he nevertheless feels obliged to emphasise that in Dick "the unmediated equation of the field of desire with the field of social production appears as the product of late-capitalist tendency to violently reduce the former to a moment of the latter" (177). In other words Dick is a good boy because he sees that ultimately capitalism rules desire.

As we see in the following chapter, Jameson also applauds the "hi-tech paranoia" of cybernetic and cyberpunk literature as exemplary forms of political postmodernism, while one gets a sense he looks down upon the amnesiac disorientation of the postmodern consumer/spectator in the midst of the culture of the simulacrum with disappointment and disapproval. In fact one finds in the taxonomy of psychiatry itself a division between the very different paranoid and catatonic schizophrenia's, two distinct forms which are respectively active and passive. I have been trying to argue that these schizo-

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<sup>33</sup> Where Durham describes the object-world as "raw matter which seems paradoxically endowed with antagonistic subjectivity of its own".

types make their way into Jameson's theory at some level, as negative and positive aspects of the same general state of abnormality. It is difficult to find Jameson directly denouncing 'schizophrenia': it is more a matter of tone, and of comments which seem to suggest culture's radical deviancy or departure from a norm or expected trajectory (which is self-contradictory, considering the essay's exposure of the absence of a norm in postmodern styles and codes), observations like the "impossible imperative to achieve that new mutation in what can perhaps no longer be called consciousness" ('Postmodernism' 31). The figure of a 'mutation in consciousness', along with the very diagnostic figure of 'schizophrenia', seems to indicate this sense of abnormality or sickness, even if he expressly distances his schizophrenic analogy from its clinical application and resonances: "I have found Lacan's account of schizophrenia useful here not because I have any way here of telling whether it has any clinical accuracy, but chiefly because - as description rather than diagnosis - it seems to me to offer a suggestive aesthetic model" ('Postmodernism' 26). But even if no comparison is intended, the fact is Jameson uses a clinical model of 'schizophrenia' (actually paranoia) to elaborate his 'aesthetic' model when he moves into a Lacanian framework. In this sense there is no difference between a 'neutral' description and a prescriptive diagnostic label - 'schizophrenia' is a term which *describes* a course of action to be taken. Additionally his 'purely' aesthetic model seems to describe both the spirit of the artistic text's production, and its effects in the act of consumption or reception; this seems to pale at the larger contradiction, that one can't talk about an aesthetic model (as opposed to a general model) when one is primarily arguing that 'aesthetics' is no longer an autonomous realm, having been subsumed by the culture industry, and roped into the everyday experiences of consumption. Following the logic of the Frankfurt School, which Jameson dutifully serves elsewhere, to "describe" aesthetics is to "diagnose" culture at large.

Other problems with the concept of schizophrenia present themselves upon scrutiny of the Lacanian model offered. We encounter Jameson explaining "very briefly" what he remembers to be Lacan's 'theory of schizophrenia':

Lacan describes schizophrenia as the breakdown in the signifying chain, that is the interlocking syntagmatic series of signifiers which constitutes an utterance or meaning. I must admit the familial or more orthodox psychoanalytical background to the situation, which Lacan transcodes into language by describing the Oedipal rivalry in terms not so much of the biological individual who is your rival for the mothers' attention but rather of what he calls the Name-of-the-Father, paternal authority now considered as a linguistic function ('Postmodernism' 26).

There is no other mention of Lacan's underlying causality and he goes on to describe the 'meaning effect' without explaining how this "background" brings about the breakdown of the chain. When the breakdown happens it has no cause: "when that relationship breaks down, when the links of that signifying chain snap, then we have schizophrenia in the form of a rubble of distinct and unrelated



signifiers" (26). However the chain can't just "snap" of its own accord. The problem that Jameson is faced with - or rather the one that he doesn't face - is that Lacan's theory is actually a description of (essentially paranoid) 'psychosis' and not of the particular condition or species of psychosis 'schizophrenia' is generally considered to be<sup>34</sup> - he remembers some of the content of Lacan's mechanistic account of the 'sliding' of the signified along the chain of signifiers, but he doesn't remember that context; the essay in which this takes place is "On the Possible Treatment of Psychosis" (in *Ecrits*), which Lacan incidentally associates with homosexuality, and not schizophrenia per se. Jameson seems to have quite simply misremembered Lacan. Furthermore the "breakdown" of signification is a symptom and an expression of psychosis, which occurs because of a particular failure in the developmental history of the subject, at the Oedipal stage, namely the 'foreclosure' or rejection of the paternal metaphor, which should attain and inhabit the Other (the place of a continuous self-questioning) and maintain the subject's sense of identity. "Freud revealed this imaginary function of the phallus, then, to be the pivot of the symbolic process that completes *in both sexes* the questioning of the sex by the castration complex" ('On the Possible Treatment of Psychosis' 198). Within the Imaginary the signifying phallus has to be "evoked" by the paternal metaphor. This failure can be determined by the real mother's respect for the law and authority of the father, as well as the father's own relation to the law, and by all the unappealing positions within it he could take up: "ideals that provide him with all too many opportunities of being in a posture of undeserving, inadequacy, even of fraud, and in short, of excluding the Name-of-the-Father from its position in the signifier" (219). When the paternal metaphor or the Name-of-the-Father is foreclosed and constitutes a lack "a hole... opens up in the signified from which the increasing disaster of the imaginary proceeds" (217). Lacan is adamant that psychosis proceeds from, in fact can only be triggered after, this failure. It is "the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father in the place of the Other that, and in the failure of the paternal metaphor, that I designate the defect that gives psychosis its essential condition" (215). This "essential condition" is not only 'inessential' to Jameson's theory, but is not present anywhere as any kind of cause. It becomes clear that Lacan's theory of psychosis is incompatible with Jameson's ideas on a number of points.

Firstly Lacan's theory, as summarised above, is geared toward a specific understanding of psychosis as opposed to neurosis. As Lacan points out: 'foreclosure' replaces 'repression' as the key term (200). This means that psychosis is the result of the personal history of the individual subject - thoroughly dependent on the 'cause' of an abnormal childhood development it has nothing to do with the 'historicity' of "late capitalism" and a cultural assault on temporality. Neither does 'neurosis' become 'psychosis', as Jameson's anxiety mutates into fragmentation or schizophrenia -- 'foreclosure' is entirely different from the mechanism of 'repression'. We might well ask whether the theory of a serious clinical disorder is appropriate for a general "aesthetic model". Surely Jameson would not want

<sup>34</sup> See Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, p5

to imply or concede that the paternal metaphor is consistently lacking in the postmodern subject, that we are all tautologically psychotic.

If Jameson's theory of the connection between postmodernism and schizophrenia does not really or theoretically emerge from a Lacanian framework the link can be found elsewhere. Debord provides the basis for both the active and inactive types of 'schizophrenia' we discerned as Jameson's schema. As we have seen the consumption-void of history in a dominantly visual and spatialised culture is what enables him to make the connection with history. The eternal present of the schizophrenic experience is more broadly attributed to the breakdown of historicity or narrative temporality, and a sense of the failure of personal and collective history as process and continuity. This connection to a 'lack of history' we can trace to one of Debord's key oppositions, the 'freezing of history' in the spectacular society: "the capitalist need which is satisfied by urbanism in the form of a visible freezing of life can be expressed in Hegelian terms as the absolute predominance of the 'peaceful coexistence of space' over the 'restless becoming in the passage of time' " (*Society of the Spectacle*, paragraph 170). The suppression of becoming is what he later identifies as schizophrenia at the level of lived history.

The parallel between ideology and schizophrenia, established by Gabrel (La Fausse Conscience) must be placed in this economic process of materialization of ideology. Society has become what ideology already was. The removal of praxis and the anti-dialectical false consciousness which accompanies it are imposed during every hour of daily life subjected to the spectacle; this must be understood as a systematic organization of the "failure of the faculty of encounter" and as its replacement by a *hallucinatory social fact*: the false consciousness of encounter, the "illusion of encounter". In a society where no one can any longer be *recognized* by others, every individual becomes unable to recognize his own reality. Ideology is at home; separation has built its world.

"In clinical charts of schizophrenia," says Gabel, "the decay of the dialectic of totality (with disassociation as its extreme form) and the decay of the dialectic of becoming (with catatonia as its extreme form) seem solidly united". The spectator's consciousness, imprisoned in a flattened universe, bound by the screen of the spectacle behind which his life has been deported, knows only the fictional speakers who unilaterally surround him with their commodities and the politics of their commodities (*Society of the Spectacle* paragraphs 217-18)

This would appear to be more like the space of failed praxis and 'becoming' that results in the 'eternal present' of Jameson's schizophrenia: "The ideal schizophrenic is easy enough to please provided only an eternal present is thrust before the eyes" ('Postmodernism' 10). The new culture of the image works against narrative continuity and erodes personal identity and empowerment, so that ultimately at the scale of personal experience "the breakdown of temporality suddenly releases this present of time from all the activities and intentionalities that might focus it and make it a space of praxis" (27). When

Jameson talks of the schizophrenic confusion and erosion of inside and outside, private and public, in the dominant cultural space produced as postmodernism, we can again recall Debord: "The spectacle obliterates the boundaries between self and world by crushing the self besieged by the presence-absence of the world and it obliterates the boundaries between true and false by driving all lived truth below the real presence of fraud ensured by the organization of appearances" (*Society of the Spectacle* paragraph 219).

Another influence also forces itself upon the 'schizophrenic' scene. In the slim-line *Mental Illness and Psychology*, the conventional view of schizophrenia is described and revised by Michel Foucault, utilising the same characteristics of "fragmentation" that Jameson sees replacing 'anxiety'. Foucault proposes the following structural analysis based on Freud and Janet:

Lastly, in confusional and schizophrenic states, the deterioration takes place as a deficit in capacity: in a horizon in which the spatial and temporal markers have become too imprecise to facilitate orientation, thinking has disintegrated and proceeds in isolated fragments, dividing up an empty, dark world with "psychic syncopes", or is enclosed in the silence of a body whose very motility is locked up in catatonia (*Mental Illness and Psychology* 27).

The notion of 'disorientation' is an important schizophrenic effect that Jameson identifies in postmodernism, and is central to his project of counter-ideological "cognitive mapping". More importantly the thought process described above as taking place in "isolated fragments" is precisely what Jameson finds in schizophrenic experience of "signifier in isolation" ('Postmodernism' 27), and the 'schizophrenic art' in which the most apt model is "a sentence in free-standing isolation" (28). Foucault goes on to add that this description of schizophrenia is insufficient, as it doesn't acknowledge the fact that there is still some kind of coherent personality in the schizophrenic person.

Inferior and simple as they may be, one must not omit the organisations by which a schizophrenic structures his world: the fragmented world that he describes accords with his dispersed consciousness, the time without future or past in which he lives reflects his inability to project himself into a future or to recognise himself in the past; but this chaos finds its point of coherence in the patient's personal structure, which guarantees the experienced unity of his consciousness and horizon. Thus, ill as a patient may be, this point of coherence cannot but exist (*Mental Illness & Society* 28).

Again we encounter a "fragmented world", and in the representation of a "inability to project himself into a future or to recognise the past" one finds almost an exact correlation with Jameson's idea of the schizophrenic "unable to unify the past, present, and future" of his "biographical experience or psychic life" ('Postmodernism' 27). Foucault implies the schizophrenic's place of habitation is in the 'present', describing it as a "time without future or past" which echoes Jameson's suggestion of "a series of pure

and unrelated presents in time" (27). It would thus appear that Jameson's understanding has more in common with Foucault's reading of schizophrenia than the confessed inspiration in Lacan's psychosis.

Regarding these various sources Jameson's theory of postmodern schizophrenia appears to be an assemblage of different theories and responses, which encompasses both positive and negative views of different characteristics. On the hand he seems to be strongly opposed to the kind of celebration of the schizophrenic experience one finds in the influential *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* of Deleuze and Guattari. They assert the schizophrenic's primal point of view as their own: "Producing machines, desiring machines everywhere, schizophrenic machines, all of species life: the self and the non-self, outside and inside, no longer have any meaning whatsoever" (*Anti-Oedipus* 2). The schizophrenic has some kind of privileged view of "nature as a process of production" (3), in which different 'machines', and different orders of machines intersect and combine with one another. Jameson is less keen on things being turned inside out, of the erosion of the barriers between "self" and the "non-self", or on the loss of the sense of the 'human' in its opposition to nature ("we make no distinction between man and nature" [*Anti -Oedipus* 4]). On the other hand 'cognitive mapping' wishes to restore a 'healthy', rational perspective through a kind of positive 'paranoid' schizophrenia, and in this sense he is an heir to the old Enlightenment protonarrative, Kant's story of emancipation *about* enlightenment, of the human emerging out of the animal or the phenomenal and machine-like realm of Nature. As we shall see in the next chapter he refigures technology, impregnating it with the old sublime power of Nature, so that 'it' once more threatens the autonomy, the very definition or meaning of the human.

## **CHAPTER FOUR : CYBERHYPE - CYBERPUNK, CYBERNETICS & THE POSTMODERN SUBLIME**

His paranoia grew. McVeigh [the Oklahoma bomber] claimed that the government had injected a computer chip into his backside. "It's all part of a programme to control Americans through computers", he said.

'Mad Bomber's Harrowing Story of Terror', *People* magazine.

The technophiles are taking us all on an utterly reckless ride into the unknown. Many people understand something of what technological progress is doing to us, yet take a passive attitude toward it because they think it is inevitable. But we don't think it is inevitable

The Unabomber's manifesto, 'Industrial Society and its Future'

## THE POSTMODERN SUBLIME -FROM KANT TO JAMESON

We may thus describe the sublime thus: it is an object (of nature) the representation of which determines the mind to think the unthinkability of nature regarded as a presentation of Ideas.

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*

The *other* of our society is in that sense no longer Nature at all, as it was in precapitalist societies, but something else which we must now identify.

Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism'

One of the most important aspects of Jameson's attempt to theorise postmodernism is the resuscitation of the aesthetic theory of the sublime, a theory which involves the formulation of a new significance for the figure of technology. The machine moves from being the Other of the bourgeois autonomous ego to constituting the metaphysical Other of the whole of humanity, in which technology takes on the role previously occupied by an untamed and ferocious force of nature. This change, which Jameson discerns at as simple a level as the transformation of the built space out of our daily environment, will be elaborated in detail below. The discussion of the postmodern variant of the sublime follows on, fairly logically, from his discussion of the new schizophrenic effect of being engulfed by an intensity of sensory experience in 'Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism'. After developing the present (postmodern) dominant of a 'schizophrenic' aesthetic, in which an older narrative temporality is broken down, and a disorientating spatiality 'forces' itself on the subject, and the subject fragments, ceasing to be able to determine its boundaries, Jameson proceeds to discuss how the concept of the sublime seems to articulate the dynamics of this schizophrenia. Initially Jameson goes about describing the Sartrean 'derealization' effect of some contemporary art, pointing to Duane Hanson's 'wax works', exact three-dimensional replications of human figures. Normal mental representation breaks down when the world becomes a momentary hallucination, real humans in the art gallery become fake, like Descartes' replicants, so many automata:

Your moment of doubt and hesitation as to the breath of these polyester figures...tends to return upon the real humans moving about you in the museum and to transform them also for the briefest instant into so many dead and flesh-coloured simulacra in their own right.

The world thereby momentarily loses its depth and threatens to become a glossy skin, a stereoscopic illusion, a rush of filmic images without density ('Postmodernism' 34)

These works infect our ideologically constructed world-view, and momentarily provide us with a glimpse into another parallel reality, a *limitless* and normally inaccessible economic 'world' inhabited by commodities and controlled by machines, which our 'glimpse' cannot begin to map, the global and total domain of capitalism itself. The lived or ideological world is shown up as a massive fiction against the materiality of this machine-world peopled by pre-programmed cyborgs. This 'solipsistic' experience

he identifies as a kind of “hysterical” sublime, which corresponds to the schizophrenic aesthetic and to the earlier Romantic sublime.

The history of the concept of the sublime provides Jameson with the materials for explaining the contemporary mutations of the experience of the extraordinary or the sublime. What attracts him to the theory of the sublime is its emphasis on the failure of representation to do justice to the totality, or that which is properly unrepresentable, and the feeling of discomfort, even dread, associated with this incapacity or breakdown. For Edmund Burke the sublime is explained as “an experience bordering on terror, the fitful glimpse, in astonishment, stupor, awe, of what was so enormous as to crush human life altogether” while this “was refined by Kant to include the question of representation itself - the object of the sublime becomes not only a matter of sheer power and of the incommensurability of the human organism with Nature but also of the limits of figuration and the incapacity of the human mind to give representation to such forces” (‘Postmodernism’ 34). Before we go further and discuss his transformation of this model, a return to Kant will give a clearer picture of the mechanism and materials being reconstructed.

### Kant

In the *Critique of Judgement* Kant goes about describing those special kinds of experience we call, or called, ‘the beautiful’ and ‘the sublime’, and attempts to ground them psychologically in specific relations between (or configurations of) the separate mental mechanisms or faculties. He posits a cognitive hierarchy, in which the senses and Imagination interact with the superior conceptual faculty of Understanding, which in turn is ruled by the ultimate faculty of Reason. The sublime is a similar type of experience to that of the beautiful (the main thrust of his book) - it is also an aesthetic judgement of ‘subjective universality’, and neither a judgement of sense nor of logic “but one of reflection” (*Critique of Judgement* 1.23). This means the delight is caused by neither sensation nor concept, which are both dependent on the external world. There are however fundamental differences between the two experiences. The ‘beautiful’ experience involves harmonious ‘free play’ between the Imagination and the Understanding - but in the sublime experience, which involves the failure of the elementary representational mechanism (the lowly Imagination) to provide a unit of measure to assess the magnitude of the perceived object, the mind is shocked into jumping a level and resorting to intercourse with the usually inaccessible realm of Reason, a short-circuiting of the Understanding altogether. What this means in short is that a person confronting a very large or powerful object fails to properly represent this object; it evades his cognitive faculties and requires special treatment from the ‘higher’ realm which deals with the unconditioned or the infinite.

Thus where the experience of beauty relates to ‘quality’ and *form* (and thus definite *limits*) the latter involves ‘quantity’ and a sense of “limitlessness, yet with a super-added thought of its totality” (*Critique of Judgement* 1.23). This means that “Nature, therefore, is sublime in such of its phenomena

as in their intuition convey the idea of their infinity” (1.26). According to Kant the pure idea (one which cannot be presented visually) of a ‘limitless totality’ is one which has its home in the supersensible realm of Reason. In terms of measurement of magnitude the Imagination is relative, whereas Reason is absolute. The sublime consists of both pleasure and displeasure (different from the pure delight of the beautiful, and closer to the feeling of ‘respect’) at the inadequacy of the Imagination to grasp the sublime ‘object’ spatially. The secondary pleasure (a “negative pleasure”) is derived from the realisation that the Imagination is *inferior* to Reason, and that this latter faculty is able to cope with the infinite, a reminder that part of us is able to transcend the empirical self.

Now the greatest effort of the imagination in the presentation of the unit for the estimation of magnitude invokes in itself a reference to something *absolutely great*, consequently a reference also to the law of reason that this alone is to be adopted as the supreme measure of what is great. Therefore the inner perception of the inadequacy of every standard of sense to serve for rational estimation of magnitude is a coming into accord with reason’s laws and a displeasure that makes alive to the feeling of the supersensible of our being, according to which it is final, and consequently a pleasure, to find every standard of sensibility falling short of the ideas of reason. (*Critique of Judgement* [1984], 1.27)

The “supersensible” is of course that higher faculty of ‘practical’ Reason that has no commerce with the “sensible” world perceived by the Senses (apart from instances such as these) and which holds such unrepresentable Ideas as that of infinity or the ‘absolutely whole’. Because the abstract Ideas of Reason have no corresponding representations or intuitions they are absolute or pure - they are not limited by a visual component. The pleasure that we feel is the internal recognition or awareness of a cognitive *hierarchy* - the superiority of Reason is only felt when the Imagination and Understanding are proved to be inadequate, and having failed in their task of grasping and measuring the phenomena, have referred the work to Reason<sup>35</sup>.

Although Nature appears as ‘might’ in the violent eruptions of nature he discerns as the *dynamic* sublime, powerful enough to quite easily crush human existence, Kant believes the subject meets the danger (psychological or physical) with a ‘fearfulness’ or a “power of resistance, which gives us courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature” (*Critique of Judgement* 1.28). Of course one has to be out of immediate physical danger to be able to reflect in this manner. But out of the experience of the sublime the subject achieves a transcendence of herself which minimises the significance of her own life and personal attachments. Kant would appear to be trying to offer a psychological explanation of what amounts to a spiritual experience - he goes as far as mentioning the ‘soul’:

<sup>35</sup> Although Kant might disapprove of this analogy, we could argue that, like the judgement of beauty, this pleasure is a ‘psychological’ pleasure, a pleasure produced by the mechanism of the mind in acknowledging itself as a multi-functional mechanism or system, but unlike beauty the sublime also involves the initial displeasure of the mind not being able to *work*, unable to function as a well-oiled machine.



For though the image, no doubt, finds nothing beyond the sensible world to which it can lay hold, still this pushing aside of the sensible barriers gives it a feeling of being unbounded; and the removal is thus a presentation of the infinite. As such it can be nothing more than a negative presentation - but still it expands the soul (*Critique of Judgement* 1.29)

The sublime thus makes us aware of ourselves as being split between levels of awareness that are only commensurable through an 'unnatural' forcing of the one into the other. It is a tickling of the soul - or "soul-stirring delight" (1.28) - a reminder that there is this other dimension to ourselves. His theorisation of the sublime is thus a corroboration of the sensible-supersensible, or phenomena-noumena opposition dealt with in the first chapter. Kant links the sublime feeling with the moral feeling attending Ideas of Practical Reason, and argues that without the capacity for experience of the latter - that is, the development of a moral component in the individual - the sublime would be merely a *negative experience of danger*.

### **Back to the Future (Jameson again)**

Although he doesn't really go into either Kant or Burke in much detail it seems as if Jameson had the dynamic sublime in mind, whose awesomeness lies in its magnitude *and* its threatening might. At first the two experiences appear to contradict each other - Kant's dynamic sublime is met with Reason, a sense of the infinite which "expands the soul", while Jameson's schizophrenic sublime is negative, either paranoid or fragmentary. But we see Kant noting how a development of the moral law in the subject is necessary for the threatening might of nature to be countered. If there is a breakdown in sensible representation but no 'spiritual' supersensible realm of freedom (which, as we saw earlier, is basically the recognition or acknowledgement of the Other as an end in himself) to redeem the experience, then all we have is a 'painful' breakdown of the cognitive mechanism. Thus Jameson's implied logic is that the complete lack of a moral dimension and the dissolution of moral depth, "the waning of affect" of the postmodern subject, has as its consequence the purely terrifying and 'negative experience of danger' when it comes to encounters with a powerful Other - an Other which in the late twentieth century is no longer Nature but Technology (as we will see shortly in more detail).

Yet this is not to say the theories are entirely commensurable - for Jameson the postmodern schizophrenic experience can be either terrifying *or* euphoric: "But is this now a terrifying or exhilarating experience?" ('Postmodernism' 34). Perhaps they are no longer as distinct; the thrills of horror or exhilaration - "that euphoria or those intensities that seem to characterise the new cultural experience" (32) - are now just a quality-less 'intensification' of experience, the *quantity* of stimulation. If this is so then Jameson seems closer here to Burke's theory of the sublime. Lyotard maintains that "For Burke, the sublime was no longer a matter of elevation (the category by which Aristotle defined

tragedy) but a matter of intensification”.<sup>36</sup> (‘The Sublime and the Avante-Garde’ 205). If pure intensification indicates Burke’s contribution, at the level of the quality or non-quality of the experience, Jameson nevertheless needs Kant’s elaborate representational model of the sublime, for much of his elaboration of the effects he wants to question requires a model dealing with the limits and incapacity of the representational faculty of the mind, its inability to do justice to the *totality* (of global capitalism). He will need Kant to bolster a theory of the sublime which will illustrate a *representational* (Althusserian) ideology straining to break through its limits to reach the domain of pure *representationless* (Althusserian) science; or to use the Kantian model, a transition from realm of sense to realm of freedom, seeing or perceiving striving to become thinking and feeling. He observes that “the Althusserian formula, in other words designates a gap, a rift, between existential experience and scientific knowledge. Ideology has the function of somehow inventing a way of articulating these two distinct dimensions with each other” (‘Postmodernism’ 53). The sublime in Kant, is a bridge between the two dimensions of the conditioned and unconditioned, and with Jameson this structure is retained: normal cultural representations (ideology, mythology) quite literally offer the subject a simple point of view, while the sublime, as the more powerful and political postmodern art, points beyond representation and its immediate world. Kathryn Lindberg notes that Jameson argues, with regard to the importance of cyberpunk as an art of the sublime, that “this is the most crucial terrain of ideological struggle today, which has migrated from concept to representation” (‘Prosthetic Mnemonics and Prophylactic Politics’ 59). Jameson implies that cyberpunk will strive towards the higher calling of ‘concept’, Reason or philosophy, and at the same time is acknowledging that the “terrain” of actual conflict is no longer conceptual; struggle now has to be representational, in a ‘spatial’ culture.<sup>37</sup>

As already mentioned, according to Jameson in this late stage of capitalism Nature has been literally conquered and erased, and has as culturally symbolic Other been replaced by the figure of Technology. Jameson warns us though, that technology is just the sign for a far larger complex of meaning we will address shortly, and we are told that “this other thing [should] not be overhastily grasped as technology per se, since I will want to show that technology is here itself a figure for something else” (35). If Burke and Kant had identified the symbolic and religious force of God and Nature as the Other of humanity, these metaphysical forces have lost their potency as confrontational and antagonistic powers in the advance of capitalism, colonialism, industrialism and the global spread of the commodity form. This seems to echo Adorno and Horkheimer’s observation:

<sup>36</sup> Lyotard sums up Burke’s more physiological theory as follows: “Here then is an account of the sublime feeling: a very big, very powerful object threatens to deprive the soul of ‘it happens’, strikes it with ‘astonishment’ (at lower intensities the soul is seized with admiration, veneration, respect). The soul is thus dumb, immobilized, as good as dead. Art, by distancing this menace, procures a pleasure of relief, of delight. Thanks to art, the soul is returned to the agitated zone between life and death, and this agitation is to its health and life.” (‘The Sublime and the Avante-Garde’ 205)

<sup>37</sup> “I think it is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages are today dominated by categories of space rather than categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism” (‘Postmodernism’ 16).

The noontide panic fear in which men suddenly became aware of the nature as totality has found its like in the panic which nowadays is ready to break out at every moment: men expect that the world, which is without any issue, will be set on fire by a totality which they themselves are and over which they have no control (*Dialectic of Enlightenment* 29).

One of the last dramatic instances of this change, the final step in the disenchantment of Nature, is witnessed in the Green Revolutions, and the yoking in of Third World agriculture into the global market system. The Green Revolutions in 'scientific' farming (producing high yields), first at home in the First World, and then the second phase in South East Asia, and Central and South America, see the conquest of Nature in both 'production' and the people or 'nations', the 'primitive' peasantries who are absorbed into a greater 'civilisation', the world of commodities. The other 'unreformable' or unindustrialisable regions (such as most of investment-resistant Africa), which don't see the benefit of the Green Revolution and industrialised agriculture, are nevertheless seen to conform to transformation via the continued push under colonial and postcolonial administration towards cash-cropping, a systematic forced transition from household subsistence to household commodity farming.

Jameson uses Ernest Mandel's three stages of capital and technological revolution to describe the modern transformation of the natural world. With the three successive stages of market, monopoly, and multinational capitalism one finds the three corresponding machine ages, three revolutions in machinery: steam, electric and combustion, and - finally in the post-1945 era - nuclear and electronic ('Postmodernism' 35). Along with these can be attached the trailing categories of realism, modernism, and postmodernism: more than anything we are in the Third Machine Age, or alternatively postmodernism. The culture of these ages celebrates the awesomeness of its dominant mode of machinery, but unfortunately for postmodern culture the apotheosis of the electronic machine, the computer, isn't really representable - or at least poses a problem to representation - its power being hidden, inside, invisibly active as opposed to kinetic (36). Additionally production is to a degree superseded, or displaced by, reproduction; television, musical equipment, databases - the information age. Reproductive appliances or networks displace moving productive machinery.

Postmodern texts sometimes offer a "glimpse into a postmodern or technological sublime" by going beyond just the representation of the reproductive processes and discerning some kind of larger network or connectedness beneath the various reproductive networks. Thus the massive communicational or computer network in popular fiction functions as a "representational shorthand" for the more dimly and distantly conceived mega-system or "global network of the third stage of capital" ('Postmodernism' 38). In this light the proliferation of conspiracy theory should be thought of as the attempt "to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system" (38). The excitement and fascination with the Other of a complex Technology is therefore the figure for, and the buffer against, an even more complex, unrepresentable, and frightening, Other. As stated above the degree of

metonymic figurality indicates and constitutes the degree of the erosion of ideological resistance to the 'real conditions of existence' or the global system.

With Jameson's emphasis on the new symbolic role of technology, we can see how his schizophrenic experiences of engulfment by the menacing other of particularly reproductive (media, electronic and computer) technology could well intersect with Kant's extrapolation of the purely subjective sublime.<sup>38</sup> We have already seen the breakdown in the moral or intersubjective domain, via the microcosm of the entropic alienation of the contemporary cinema pseudo-community, which moves from social-ideological to individual-hormonal pleasures. With regard to this transition, Debord, a strong theoretical vector in Jameson, seems to address the political consequences of this mutation of the film and other representational media, identifying 'the spectacle' as a mechanism of psychic disintegration and social alienation:

Philosophy, the power of separate thought and the thought of separate power, could never by itself supersede theology. The spectacle is the material reconstruction of the religious illusion. Spectacular technology has not dispelled the religious clouds where men had placed their powers detached from themselves; it has only tied them to an earthly base. The most earthly life has thus become opaque and unbreathable. It no longer projects to the sky but shelters within itself its absolute denial, its fallacious paradise. The spectacle is the technical realization of the exile of human powers into a beyond; it is separation perfected within the interior of man. (*Society of the Spectacle* paragraph 20)

The power (and powers) of myth and of religion is no longer invisible; it now plays itself out on the television screen. Removed from the subject, the (only occasionally) "Promethean" ('Postmodernism' 36) power to build, reconstruct and change the social world was via theology once invested in a deity, externalised in a transcendent world, the Kingdom of heaven. That same authority, a legitimating power, has been returned to the human world, but, now built into the mechanism of the media, it still separates most of humanity from the world of power and empowerment, both in terms of its medium, a one-way relation of enthrallment, entanglement and mass separation, and its message of power happening 'there' (the Olympian machinations of the soap-opera, the majestic gestures of the 'superpower', etc.) - the meta-message that only a few can act and interact, while the rest must watch, consume and live vicariously. Debord identifies a hidden function of the media beyond that of the older ideological unificatory myth; one of fragmenting, separating or even desocialising classes or groups, a vector undermining the very fabric of social interaction and collective action. This strategy and effect

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<sup>38</sup> Connecting this experience with what will later be called schizophrenia, is Kant's description of withdrawal from social interaction as a sublime experience - perhaps preceding the more modern concepts of alienation. "We must however remark that *separation from society* is regarded as sublime, if it rests upon ideas that overcome all sensible interest. To be sufficient for oneself, and consequently to have no need for society, without at the same time being unsociable, i.e without flying from it, is something bordering on the sublime" (*Critique of Judgement* 1.29). How was he to know that separation from or transcendence of social being would be achieved through the external sense mechanisms of the representational technologies, and not through ascetism or the moral domain of freedom?

of *isolating* the individual subject, leading to its heightened sense of its vulnerability or 'smallness', seems to be the root of both sublime and schizophrenic 'intensities'.

Deleuze and Guattari are additional influences on Jameson's thought with regard to the relation of technological change to subjectivity. In a distinction that distinctly resembles Jameson's cultural extrapolation of Ernest Mandel's Second and Third Machine Ages the two authors (Deleuze and Guattari) maintain that a recent change in subjectivity has taken place, resulting in a 'machinic enslavement' of postmodern subjectivity: "If motorized machines constituted the second ages of the technical machine, cybernetic and informational machines form a third age that reconstructs a generalized regime of subjection: recurrent and reversible "human-machine systems" replace the old nonrecurrent and nonreversible relations of subjection between the two elements" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 458). Exactly the same kind of epochal determinism is at work here, with pretty much the same terms; the advent of a new age of the informational machine brings about a change in human subjectivity in both theories. Their example of 'machinic enslavement' is the human-TV relation - "one is enslaved by TV as a human machine insofar as the television viewers are no longer consumers or users, nor even subjects who "make" it, but intrinsic components, "input" and "output", feedback or recurrences that are no longer connected to the machine in such a way as to produce it or use it" (458). This disapproval is echoed by Jameson's insistence on a new subjectivity dependent or addicted to hallucinogenic stimuli (an experience which generates 'intensities' as opposed to affect), as is demonstrated by the remark "the ideal schizophrenic, indeed, is easy enough to please provided only an eternal present is thrust before the eyes" ('Postmodernism' 10).

As noted above Jameson's use of the term technology is just "shorthand" for what we commonly and crudely call 'modern society', the new world of postmodern space. It is the new interior cybernetic environments of home and office, the landscaped exteriors of our built technological and economic environment, the barely conceivable informational networks, financial flights and flows and trade routes of global commerce and capital. At the literal level of machinery, the word 'technology' is also a buffer against the negative force of resentment that could and should be associated with a power removed from producers: "technology may well stand as adequate shorthand to designate that properly human and anti-natural power of dead human labour stored up in our machinery - an alienated power" ('Postmodernism' 35). But in terms of its figurality, technology also stands in for the whole process-system of multinational capitalism itself. "The technology of contemporary society is therefore mesmerizing and fascinating not so much in its own right but because it seems to offer some privileged representational shorthand for grasping a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds to grasp: the whole new decentred global network of the third stage of capital itself" (38). Jameson's argument seems to be that 'weaker' postmodern texts don't manage to extend the figural dimensions of technology beyond the immediate and normalised object-world of the present, and thus merely and superficially produce meaning about reproduction or information society, *containing*

technology as merely so many interchangeable props, technological gadgets and equipment, while stronger or more “energetic” texts “beyond all thematics or content seem to tap the networks of the reproductive process and thereby to afford us some glimpse into a postmodern or technological sublime, whose power and authenticity is documented by the success of such works in evoking a whole new postmodern space in emergence around us” (37). While weaker texts contain the present as the product of literally smooth and harmless historical and technological innovations and transitions, along a Utopian trajectory of benign progress, the more powerful artefacts begin to bear witness to that which is not present (neither geographically nor historically\consciously) or even presentable, the repressed historical reality of alienation, subjugation and control upon which the technology and ‘superiority’ of the first world is founded. Although there is obviously no clear line between political and non-political texts, it would be apparent nevertheless that the political aspect of any work is a matter of its ‘richness’ of evocation, its degree of figurality. Rather than choosing the ‘politics-of-everything’ route, a rather hackneyed critical move which claims that all texts are equally ‘political’ regardless of intelligence or superficiality, Jameson mobilises older literary values of depth, of quality, to evaluate the degree of a text’s awareness and scope, and in order to selectively confer the status of being ‘political’.

### **Hyping Technology**

In the next section we will see how, according to Jameson, cybernetic or “high-tech paranoia” fiction such as cyberpunk is the supreme and chosen example of the politically-engaged artistic text which attempts to give technology its true or proper figural dimensions, and which tries to think the totality of global capitalism. For the moment however I would like to comment on what appears to be a lacuna in Jameson’s argument. In analysing the three-part movement of stages of capital we saw how Jameson unproblematically transplanted Mandel’s economic determinism into his own essay. Jameson doesn’t see a contradiction between the culture of the simulacrum, which in Debord’s eyes poses the problem of distinguishing between the real and the fictional for *both* spectator and the cultural theorist, and Mandel’s base-superstructure determinism of culture reflecting technological leaps. For Jameson, following Mandel (and Adorno), the culture of the simulacrum is just mirage or effect, an effect of the intensification of the culture industry’s commodification drive. On the other hand, later on in the essay he admits a “prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm, to the point at which everything in our social life - from economic value and state power ... - can be said to have become cultural in some original and yet untheorized sense.” (‘Postmodernism’ 49). Here he returns to Baudrillard and Debord, who point to the fiction or staging of the ‘real’, including the economic, where the ‘truth of postmodernism’ is its utter saturation of and occupation of lived space by signs to the point where it is no longer possible to maintain the essentially fictional line between economic and cultural spheres, or between truth and fiction. How does this then impact on Mandel’s earlier suggestion of an ‘essence’ to the economic formation?

The fundamental revolutions in power technology - the technology of the production of motive machines by machines- thus appears as the determinant moment in revolutions of technology as a whole. Machine production of steam-driven motors since 1848; machine production of electric and combustion motors since the 90s of the 19th century; machine production of electronic and nuclear-powered apparatuses since the 40s of the 20th century- these are the three general revolutions in technology engendered by the capitalist mode of production since the “original” industrial revolution of the late 18th century (Mandel quoted in ‘Postmodernism’ 35)

Although one wouldn’t want to quibble over the value and connotations of ‘revolutionary’ or ‘fundamental’, or ‘innovations’, one should surely question the “revolutionary” and central status of the so-called ‘power technologies’, which Mandel seems to establish as some kind of autonomous economic essence or transcendental principle of a particular economic situation, internally meaningful and independent of external (or cultural ) influences in terms of its importance. Although maintaining that in postmodernism “everything in our social life - including economic value... can be said to have become cultural” Jameson seems to want to maintain a contradictory, traditional position, alongside Mandel, that certain economic values, most notably that of the ‘core’ “power technology” which makes other technology (and here we have a metaphysical origin or first cause), follow their own pure logic, and are exempt from this new cultural determinism<sup>39</sup>. In my book the importance - or what is really the *perceived* dominance - of a particular form of technology has to be returned, in part, to the sphere of cultural production.

The logic here is the obvious principle, quite familiar to Marxism, that value is created by humans and language. If some values (exchange value being the obvious example) are more routinely or mechanically ‘produced’ than ‘created’, then the general cultural value of a ‘dominant’ technology is more created than produced, the result of a hegemonic cultural celebration of its power over weaker others. Dominance is *seen*, culturally constructed, a created difference rather than an inherent superiority of value. With regard to postmodern society this amounts to the view that the electronic or nuclear ‘power technology’ is not *necessarily* ‘central’ to economic production, but *mythically* privileged and maintained - this is consistent with one of the subtexts of Jameson’s essay, which is that the West or the First World erroneously believes it is a postindustrial organism, which has no need of ‘older’, or what are seen as peripherally industrial, modes of production. What needs to be examined and demonstrated is how a certain technological ‘mode’ within a given economic system is (initially and then hegemonically) *given* the status of the dominant technology over others in existence - how in our

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<sup>39</sup> Derrida has demonstrated how important an imagined center is to the ‘structurality’ of a structure: “By orientating and organising the structure, the centre of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form ...[but] it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which, while governing the structure, escapes structurality” (‘Structure, Sign and Play’ 109). He goes on to show how this kind of metaphysical thinking assuming pure ‘presence’ is finally being challenged.

age, in national and global systems of circulation, the reproductive digital machinery (computer and media technology) is celebrated over the older yet equally 'fundamental' machinery of heavy industry, of Third World agriculture. Jameson goes some way to recognising the constitutive role of culture in celebrating, mythologising and bringing about the dominance of an illusionary 'core', epochal technology in his observation of the Futurist's euphoria, "the excitement of machinery in the moment of Capital preceding our own, the exhilaration of futurism, most notably, and of Marinetti's celebration of the machine gun and the motor car" ('Postmodernism' 36). This overzealous creativity is however pruned by a gardener who wants to keep the plant close to the ground, "These are still visual emblems, sculptural nodes of energy which give tangibility and figuration to the motive energies of the earlier moment of modernization" (36). Art is returned to reflecting a prior economic movement, the base-superstructure paradigm surfacing again to keep cultural production in its place as reflection.

What needs to be asserted is the complicity of the cultural sphere in the affirmation and perpetuation of technological dominance or 'centrality', the creative role played by cultural vectors in what emerges as the resultant or the dominant. Culture doesn't just legitimate economic value: it helps create it. Cultural production involves itself in the positing of an essence of presence of a technological *zeitgeist* - in the Second Machine Age, by the combined forces usually brought together under the label 'Modernism'. The machine aesthetic certainly appears more than an Italian eccentricity, as the following extract from Wyndham Lewis illustrates. In *Blasting and Bombadiering*, his raucously irreverent account of earlier passions and exploits, Lewis describes an encounter with the arch-Futurist, Marinetti, which reveals a shared perspective underneath superficial differences (indeed they agree to differ, as the saying goes):

"You are a futurist, Lewis!" he shouted at me one day, as we were passing into a lavabo together, where he wanted to wash after a lecture where he had drenched himself in sweat.

"No," I said.

"Why don't you announce you are a Futurist?" he asked me squarely.

"Because I am not one" I answered, just as point-blank and to the point.

"Yes, but what's it matter!" said he with great impatience.

"It's most important," I replied rather coldly.

"Not at all!" said he. "Futurism is good. It is all right."

"Not too bad," said I. "It has its points. But you Wops insist too much on the Machine. You're always on about the these driving-belts, you are always exploding about internal combustion. We've had machines here in England for a donkey's years. They're no novelty to *us*."

"You have never understood your machines! You have never known the *ivresse* of travelling at a kilometre a minute. Have you ever travelled at a kilometre a minute?"



"Never." I shook my head energetically. "Never. I loathe anything that moves too quickly. If it goes too quickly it is not there."

"It is not there!" he thundered for this had touched him in the raw. "It is *only* when it goes quickly that it *is* there!"

"That is nonsense," I said. "I cannot see a thing that is going too quickly."

"See it - see it! Why should you want to *see*?" he exclaimed. "But you *do* see it. You see it multiplied a thousand times. You see a thousand things instead of one thing" (38)

Lewis' ambivalence towards Marinetti's aesthetic is revealed when he grudgingly admits it's "not too bad". Although the whole story recounts his own resistance, and that of the "great London Vortex", to the ideological 'advances' of Marinetti's Futurism, one gets a sense that there is a grudging admiration for the personal charisma, anarchic energy and ideology of the "Wop". What stops him from joining the ranks of the Futurist machine cult is not so much any aesthetic or ideological difference, but rather personal rivalry, ego politics, what he elsewhere confesses to be a touch of megalomania: "The 'leadership' principle, you understand, was in my bones" (*Blasting and Bombadiering* 36). There are however minor ideological differences: Lewis finds the 'Italian' celebration of the machine a bit excessive.

The point I am trying to make here is not so much the 'underlying' sameness of Modernist viewpoints, but the collective *activity* of not just 'reflecting', but critiquing, thinking, rejecting and 'hying' technological change as progress. As well as looking at 'real' technological innovations or revolutions, the perceptions of a revolution or new order need to be addressed. Thus Le Corbusier's observation regarding the opening of a new 'open' space of praxis becomes a contribution to the sense of the crystallisation of a Second modern world: "To take hold of the modern world and lift it into the fantastic possibilities of a machine civilisation endowed with unbelievable powers, that is the adventure possible and open to those who are prepared to risk their ease" (*New World of Space* 11). While Jameson is *theoretically* willing to give Modernism some kind of semi-autonomy in relation to postmodernism's conflation of 'economy' and 'culture', when he actually looks at some of the Modernist representations of Second Machine Age technology (to illustrate the relative ease of their depictions of external, kinetic machines in relation to our 'internal', secretive workings of the computer) they are once again presented as so many passive reflections of the 'power technology' of the day.

What is omitted in this mode of analysis is the intentional and competing strategies of conferring the status and values of 'newness', 'centrality', 'progress' or 'otherness' on this object-world. When fleetingly referring to Charles "...Sheeler's grain elevators and smokestacks" ('Postmodernism' 36) as representative of a relatively easy Modernist *reflection* of the dominant Second Machine Age power technology (when compared with the secretive, invisible workings of contemporary computer technology), Jameson removes the semi-autonomy he is theoretically willing to give Modernism in relation to postmodernism's erosion of the space between economic and cultural

spheres (48). In looking at comparative epochal treatments of respective power technologies, Sheeler and contemporary Modernists are all reduced to simple corroboration of a pre-existing and economically defined and ‘fundamentally’ dominant power technology. What this mode of analysis omits is the intentional and competing aesthetic strategies of creating status and value, of the ‘progressiveness’, ‘strangeness’, ‘centrality’ of the new industrial landscapes and kinds of machines, factories, and technology. While one might posit a Modernist *zeitgeist* of emancipation through industrialisation cutting across political ideologies, it is important to recognise differences and alliances within the larger synthetic whole. As Tashjian points out, Sheeler chooses a certain (conservative) ideological perspective, and thus plays a constitutive role in the emergence of a machine aesthetic which affirms a certain techno-economic (and cultural) tangent:

...Sheeler was deeply committed to a celebration of American life. Despite the Depression he never felt alienated from the large-scale technological forces at work in America society...Sheeler’s Precisionist aesthetic was finally predicated on an ideological acceptance of modern technology at the heart of industry an urban life. Such a position was controversial at a time during the 1920s when intellectuals and artists were debating the social value of technology (*William Carlos Williams and the American Cultural Scene: 1920-1940* 86).

On the other hand we find a more sceptical William Carlos Williams in the first two stanza’s of ‘Classic Scene’ treating the same subject matter, but questioning the status of what is for Jameson an unproblematic “smokestack”:

A power-house  
in the shape of  
red brick chair  
90 feet high

on the seat of which  
sit the figures  
of two metal  
stacks - aluminium

[commanding an area...] (*William Carlos Williams* 84)

As Tashjian suggests the power technology of the “powerhouse” is represented as a perverse manifestation of an older symbolic act of deification, in which natural objects or forces are given supernatural powers and anthropomorphic form, as in the sublime. “Williams uses words that can be taken to describe the powerhouse literally but that also extend a submerged conceit likening the smokestacks to monolithic figures, ancient sculpture of the gods on their thrones perhaps” (*William*

*Carlos Williams* 85). In turning the smokestack into a god, one could argue Williams subtly mocks the hollow 'religion' of technological progress and the constructed centrality of the new 'idolatrous' machinery.

Thus culture dominates through its dominants: at the same time cultural production can't all be reduced to the cultural dominant or aesthetic 'sensitivity' - texts can be judged with regard to the degree of complicity with a dominant, with their acceptance or rejection of a given value-formation. As I have mentioned, this perspective - one which sees the construction (or fiction) of dominance - contributes to an understanding of the present hegemonic mythology of a postindustrial Utopia around the corner, as welcomed by Daniel Bell, and will also help explain some of the ideological mechanisms which participate in the construction of class, international and inter-regional power-relationships (relations which can't simply be reduced to economic). Jameson's concern is that the very notion of 'post-industrialism' serves to banish from consciousness the difficult and unpleasant ethico-economic relations of dependency on other classes and populations. But while on the one hand it is tempting to attribute the skewed relation of reproductive machinery over productive machinery simply to the pre-existing (and according to Marxism, eternal) division of labour between 'mental' and 'physical' work, this latter opposition doesn't seem to hold as much water as it used to. Although the euphoria around the information-age serves in part a conventional ideological function, it also deploys and affirms a new legitimating principle, a new meta-rule of logic or reasoning which asserts the primacy and transcendence of cybernetic efficiency. Once it has been accepted that culture, particularly the culture of the simulacrum, is the kingmaker and not just the handmaiden of the market, then it can be shown how with *cyberhype* the neo-Futurist celebration and embracement of technology becomes the metaphor of a philosophical or ethical mutation at the heart of material culture, and the establishment and enshrinement of the cybernetic legitimating principle of 'performativity'.

## CYBER[N]ET[H]ICS

### Answering the question: What is cyberpunk? - Cyberpunk or Cyberhype

We have decided to call the entire field of control and communication theory, whether in the machine or in the animal, by the name of cybernetics

Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics*

What is interesting about many of the critical works dealing with specific cyberpunk texts is that they inevitably end up returning to a nagging question - one perceives an obligation to answer the more general question of what the neologism 'cyberpunk' actually means or refers to. The question seems to haunt these studies, as if there is an awareness at some level of the blatant materiality and malleability of its signifying function, as something deployed in discourse seen as a chain of signifiers;

a conspicuous cog in an inconspicuous machine. Its newness and constructedness as a 'forged' sign seems to echo cyberpunk's alleged central thematic obsession with the materiality and superficiality of the human body exemplified in the cyborg; all of these signals can be read as symptomatic of the new 'popular materialism' that we saw Jameson identified in postmodernism: "the deep underlying materiality of all things has finally risen dripping and convulsive into the light of day; and it is [now] clear that culture itself is one of those things whose fundamental materiality is now for us not merely evident but inescapable" ('Surrealism without the Unconscious' 67). The actual word 'cyberpunk', and the cyborg, seems to signal or stand in for a deeper awareness of a cultural context, a language-machine, in which subjectivities are just cogs or parts like the social 'mechanisms' Kant saw as a necessary evil in 'private reason'. As Jameson points out the blatant and flagrant materialism and materiality of the Culture Industry or the media retrospectively refigures culture as always having been 'mechanical' or functionalist in some way.

Before one even gets to the debate around the legitimacy of the 'progressive' aspects of cyberpunk, the very process of defining 'cyberpunk' seems plagued with ambiguity and contradiction. There seems to be no consensus amongst critics on how to define cyberpunk either as a genre/style or as a movement - often a generic or formalist analysis would appear too vexed to even attempt, and critics resort to the easier task of pointing to a group of writers in the eighties who regard themselves as a movement of sorts. In this mode of definition the name 'cyberpunk' refers less to the kind of characters in the stories than to the style or ideology of this literary group and possibly even the writers themselves, a view promoted by the novelist and publicist Bruce Sterling; Stirling maintains "[s]uddenly a new alliance is becoming evident, an integration of technology and eighties subculture. An unholy alliance of the technical world of pop culture, visionary fluidity, and street level anarchy" (quoted in Olsen 278). Apart from the question of the validity of this description of goal-orientated strategy (to what end did cyberpunk mobilise itself?) the generality and nebulousness of this description (which amounts to merely a fashion sense of 'where its happening') problematises this as a definition.

In terms of a *thematic* definition, the cyberpunk writer and editor of *Mondo 2000* Rudy Rucker maintains rather blandly that "cyberpunk fiction is really ABOUT the fusion of humans and machines...There is a massive human\computer symbiosis developing faster than we can think about it realistically" (*The User's Guide to the New Edge* 9). The preceding chapters have hopefully demonstrated that what Rucker claims as the essential preoccupation of cyberpunk has been around for a while. Brian McHale, one of the major cyberpunk critics, offers a formalist's definition in 'Towards a Poetics of Cyberpunk', with lots of empirical evidence to substantiate his claims, that "there are three main bundles or complexes of motifs which cyberpunk SF shares with mainstream postmodernist fiction: motifs of what might be called "worldness"; motifs of the centrifugal self; and motifs of death, both individual and collective" (247). "Worldness" turns out to be a repetition of his rather reductive assertion in *Postmodernist Fiction* that postmodern fiction is about 'ontological' issues, while

Modernist fiction asks, less radically, more 'epistemological' questions. Equally banal is the incredibly tedious question that McHale reckons cyberpunk throws out for postmodern subjectivity with its cyborg figure: "At what point does a human being cease to be a human being and begin to count as a machine?" (256) - a reversal of the conventional SF AI question, 'when does a machine become human?'. In a 'postmodernism-as-cultural-logic-of-late-capitalism' formulation Terence Whalen suggests that "the cyberpunks, the mirror-shaded writers from a hi-tech counterculture who put a hard dystopian spin on the post-industrial age without ever disputing its ascendancy" ('The Future of a Commodity' 76) bear witness to the emergence of an information economy where commodified information serves business and there is no "correlation between information and enlightenment" (78) as popular myth would have it. And this analysis sees the 'cyberpunk' as a street-wise writer.

From a totally different (Jungian) angle Ronald Schmitt sees cyberpunk, as exemplified by Gibson, as being the symbolic articulation of resistance to an authority who abuses power in society. Technology's cybernetic function is subverted by a young class of rebels, and his essay commits itself to looking at "the ways in which primitive mythology is used in ritualising and symbolising this rebellion against authority" ('The Novels of William Gibson' 65), ways which cyberpunk shares with punk music, such as their common identification with the primal warrior archetype. With regard to the semantics of the name 'cyberpunk', it would appear in this interpretation to refer to the characters; he points to some of Gibson's characterological creations, the body-painting and mutilation, the voodoo-derived *loa* in cyberspace, shades of shamanism, concluding that "Gibson's heroes are truly cyberpunks that use technology and mythology to wreak havoc on a technologically based, corporated world" (67). But if Schmitt sees cyberpunk and cyberspace as another manifestation of the eternal recurrence of inner human symbolism, a projection of the primitive, internal past, Lance Olsen maintains that these creations are a reflection of the external, inhuman future: "The most striking emblem of cyberpunk integration are the mirrorshades...Mirrorshades depersonalize and dehumanize, giving world rather than self back to the viewer" ('The Shadow of Spirit in William Gibson's Matrix Trilogy' 279).

On the other hand, the very notion of a cyberpunk 'school', genre or movement has been questioned. Olsen grudgingly allows the cyberpunk 'collective' a kind of validity within illusion after emphasising difference and a "vaguely defined" sensibility: "Although what may finally matter most in speculative fiction are the differences rather than the similarities among the loose group whose names have been connected with cyberpunk...it is nonetheless significant that during the middle of the last decade a number of writers in the amalgam viewed themselves as belonging to a movement that shared a vaguely defined but deeply felt sensibility" ('The Shadow of Spirit in William Gibson's Matrix Trilogy' 278). In Rob Latham's 'CyberPunk=Gibson=Neuromancer' cyberpunk is described as "a historically useful, if now perhaps dated, term describing the work of a group of consciously affiliated writers striving to bring SF into the information age at the beginning of the 80s" (267) - a similar

emphasis here more on the sense of affiliation than anything inhering in the texts themselves. Nicola Nixon casts a harsher light on the movement, suggesting that the coherence of a cyberpunk 'programme' is more due to the slick marketing campaign run by the self-proclaimed publicist and marketer of cyberpunk, Bruce Sterling, than any genuinely shared and revolutionary aesthetic or ethic ('Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for the Revolution or Keeping the Boys Happy' 220). She shows how Stirling mobilises a 'male' SF lineage, whose "classic Hard" conservatism is first embraced as tradition and then flamboyantly rejected: "once he has unearthed adventurous fathers and constituted a satisfying filiation for cyberpunk writers, he can figure oedipal rebellion, reinterring the fathers as "mainstream" and celebrating the sons as young turks" (220). Nixon asks "But is cyberpunk realizing a coherent political agenda? Is it indeed "preparing the ground for a revolution"?" (221), suggests that it might be nothing more "professional, self-interested hype or a clever marketing strategy on the part of the SF publishing industry itself" (221) and states that "'cyberpunk' is, to a certain extent, a catch-all, convenient label for the work of a number of heterogeneous writers" (221). This assault on the validity of the term then moves into a deft evaluation of the legitimacy of cyberpunk's claims to being "sexy social critique" (222) through an analysis of various strands in Gibson's work.

### Cyberpunk Sociology

In studies of the emergence of the sub-generic style of cyberpunk, the influence of the popular futurist sociologies, particularly of Toffler, has been observed (Olsen 279). Lance Olsen maintains that "many cyberpunk ideas about these issues were influenced by Alvin Toffler's *The Third Wave* (1980) a generally optimistic futurist sociological study that Sterling calls a "bible to many cyberpunks"(xii)" ('The Shadow of Spirit in William Gibson's Matrix Trilogy' 279). In many senses the ambivalence which characterises the cyberpunk response to technology is discernible in Toffler's future of a 'practopia', which is neither utopian or dystopian (one might simply accuse it of fence-sitting):

But Third Wave civilisation is also no 'anti-utopia'. It is not *1984* writ large or *Brave New World* brought to life. Both these brilliant books, and hundreds of derivative science-fiction stories paint a future based on highly centralized, bureaucratized and standardized societies in which individual differences are eradicated. We are now heading in the opposite direction (*The Third Wave* 367).

Elsewhere Toffler dismisses the myths that abound about multinational control of the global economy, and in its place points to a new kind of postnationalism, geographically and politically decentred and restructured around common goals through networks and matrices (337). This is consistent with the underlying narrative of emancipation, that the Third Wave "frees us from the machine" (256). To what degree this view of the West's trajectory in fact insinuates itself into cyberpunk and Gibson's fictions needs to be investigated by working through the fictional material in some detail, a process undertaken below.

Meanwhile Toffler offers a new role for the activist as “techno-rebel” in the Third Wave, a position which has some links with a Romantic and Luddite past, but is more accommodating with regards to technology, and faces the future head on.. This could also be seen to be related to the romance of oppositionality and the affirmation of sub-cultural languages and organisations one detects in cyberpunk.

“However, most of today’s techno-rebels are neither bomb-throwers nor Luddites. They include thousands of people who are themselves scientifically trained ...as well as millions of ordinary citizens.” (*Third Wave* 162)

“They begin not with technology but with hard questions about what kind of future society we want. They recognize we now have so many technological opportunities we can no longer fund, develop and apply them all. They argue therefore the need to select more carefully among them and choose those technologies that serve long-range social and ecological goals” (163)

“The techno-rebels contend that technology need not be big , costly or complex in order to be ‘sophisticated’.”(164)

“The techno-rebels are also disturbed by the radical imbalance of science and technology ... [and]...favour devoting more technological attention to the world’s poor” (164-5).

“Taken as a whole the techno-rebel programme provides the basis for humanizing the technological thrust” (165)

Pop sociology seems to offer the cyberpunk artist-creator quite an attractive identity, with plenty of street-cred in addition to an older social ‘revolutionary’ status. The notion of an enlightened vanguard of non-violent technology-wise individuals (falling a bit short of the requirements for a revolutionary class, but providing an attractive model for those who don’t want to rock the foundations) finds some resonance in McLuhan’s description of the role of the artist who is able to transcend the mundane experience and acceptance of the everyday electric age: “The serious artist is the only person able to encounter technology with impunity, just because he is an expert aware of the changes in sense perception” (*Understanding Media* 33).

Do cyberpunk writers perhaps model themselves on or identify with this class of people that Toffler identifies, the “techno-rebels”? One needs to take one step back and ask: does ‘cyberpunk’ and the associated techno-rebel ideology in fact refer to the writers themselves or to the characters and thematics of the texts? Certainly some of the characters and groups in the film *Johnny Mnemonic* (Longo, 1995) appear to be modelled on this imaginary vanguard role. The Loteks are a rebel group of media terrorists who join forces with Johnny and Molly against multinational capital. We are left in no doubt as to their narrative and characterological function: they are defined as rebels from the word go. The opening title sequence of the film rolls up some introductory text which explains the Loteks as “a resistance movement risen from the streets: hackers, data-pirates, guerrilla fighters in the info- wars. The corps defend themselves, they hire the Yakuza, still the most powerful of all the crime syndicates”.

Against the dominating, conformist and hyper-organized high-tech 'syndicates', whether commercial (the corps) or political (the Yakuza) (which are all part of the same system of multinational capital anyway), the 'low-tech' motley crew of individual misfits, the Loteks, have spontaneously "risen" and crystallised.<sup>40</sup>

The underground Lotek collective, seems to be living according to Toffler's "techno-rebel programme", avoiding *big* technology, using *clean* technology, and *redistributing* wealth and resources, playing Robin Hood for the poverty-stricken masses (who can't afford the cure for the awful Nerve Attenuation Syndrome [NAS]). The Lotek headquarters, a suspended industrial environment called Heaven, provides a whole interior urban space wrought out of recycled mechanical and electronic parts and junk, a fact which if missed visually, is explicitly spelt out to Johnny - and the hermeneutically challenged suburban viewer - when he is first introduced to the place by Lotek leader, Jaybone. This eco-friendly use of domestic technology is echoed in Lotek defensive technology, their 'primitive' yet effective weaponry. While their use of the "low technology" of crossbows and arrows - standing out in stark contrast to the guns and high-tech weapons of the dominant Yakuza and corporate culture (one Yakuza strongman has a kind of laser whip which slices through limbs and bodies with great effectiveness) - is supposed to conjure up the merry band of brigands inhabiting Sherwood Forest, this also alludes to that other rather hackneyed signifier of tribal eco-friendly consciousness, the 'Red Indian'.<sup>41</sup>

Ronald Schmidt draws a comparison between punk (and cyberpunk) stylistic signification and the aggressive visual symbolism of the primitive warrior, suggesting that punks identify and emulate the aggressive posturings of the latter. "Where the hippies endorsed a natural, earthy look with long flowing hair, the punks 'elaborate hairdos [e.g. the Mohawk] and thick applications of brightly-coloured make-up resemble the Native American braves' feathered head-dresses and warpaint" ('Mythology and Technology' 66). The Loteks as cyberpunks share the identification with primitive garb and hairstyling with the 70s and 80s punks, but the warrior signification is even more conspicuous as they literally copy the facial warpaint of the Native Americans. Ice-T, who plays Jaybone, the leader of the Loteks, has tended to play macho, aggressive roles in his previous films, consistent with his 'real life' aggressive persona as a rap-artist, an identity which reinforces the ghetto rebel-warrior connotation. He is obviously (and, in his other life, outspokenly) a 'man of colour', which again gives the seal of authenticity to the group, 'blackness' standing in for 'redness', but also lending its own particular shade of Negroid rebellion and resentment to the semiotic complex. Ice-T/Jaybone, whose position as rebel leader makes him the concentrated symbol and focal centre of the Lotek structure,

<sup>40</sup> Somewhere between this Manichean dualism lies the free-wheeling contracting class of 'console cowboys' and 'couriers', "elite agents who smuggle data in wet-wired brain implants"- of whom Johnny is a member.

<sup>41</sup> The ecological strand, a variant of the older 'freedom' ideologeme, reaches its climax and resolution with a super-dolphin (Nature, eco-awareness) conquering encryption (Technology, capitalism), and saving Johnny from brain damage and the world population from NAS. Nature also has a mini-triumph over technology when the dolphin manages to fry the inhuman Street Preacher



exudes armchair anthropological connotations of 'ethnicity', 'culture' (as opposed to 'society'), a contemporary sense of *minority, oppressed* 'culture' (and an opposition which could be reinterpreted as speech against writing, nature rising against culture, man against the machine, and so on). This helps mobilise our old friend, the protonarrative or ideologeme of freedom, as a narrative skeleton for the film's narrative -- but inverts it. Instead of moving into modernity, from barbarism to civilisation, we have a Rousseauian nostalgia which wills a return to primitivism and the noble savage. Although the film's denouement of deprivatising and publicising the cure for NAS resolves a global struggle of haves against have-nots, it also enacts a fantasy return from *Gesellschaft* to *Gemeinschaft*, where the tribe, the village, the clan or tribe (American Indians, African-American slave culture) triumph against a more complex and alienating bureaucratic organisation of social life (the corps [Pharmakon], the Yakuza).

To (rhetorically) rephrase an earlier question, are the Loteks the embodiment, the fantasy image, of not just Toffler's "techno-rebels", or Jameson's or McLuhan's political artist, but the imaginary identity of the 'cyberpunk' himself? The enigmatic neologism of 'cyberpunk' as pure signifier, was certainly awaiting some kind of visual representation, some manifestation, having being drawn into the public domain after the meteoric rise of the 'cyberspace' concept, which *did* come to have a referential coefficient in the Internet. People, outside literary circles and a sci-fi readership, didn't have much to put to the word - the 'punk' suffix did cut quite a mean, lean figure of opposition to authority, but what was this new 'cyberpunk' identity, what did they look like, what kind of attitudes, commitments, praxis emanated from the cyberpunk position? Unfortunately William Gibson looks like quite an ordinary guy, pretty straight and downright nerdish at the end of the day. The Loteks, in their visual iconography and 'style' and their ridiculously successful caper against the Pharmakon corporation, seem to be some kind of compensation, a commodified excuse, for the hollowness, the manufacturing of the cyberpunk concept as a 'real' literary phenomenon, both in term of lifestyle and coherent political ideology and praxis. Their creation (that of the Loteks) and deployment in the film *Johnny Mnemonic* seems simultaneously to fantasise and lie about the existence and possibility of radical cultural politics in the postmodern world, and reveals Hollywood (and Gibson as author and script-writer) cashing in through the commodification of a concept, that of 'cyberpunk', already beginning to lose currency.

Punk music is another sociological parallel, prequel or analogy to cyberpunk often pointed to by the critics, and a comparison that needs to be investigated and challenged. Lance Olsen, pronouncing on the *punk* half of *cyberpunk*, describes the "connotations of the countercultural sociosphere, especially late 1970s punk-rock, itself an embodiment of visionary intensity, anarchic violence, and an attempt to return to the pure roots of rock and roll in the same way cyberpunk attempts to return to the experimentalism of New Wave writers" (278). The "connotations" might well be suggested but are they substantiated by the 'cyberpunks' themselves? In a book on 'cybernetic fiction' which precedes and

unwittingly anticipates the critical hype around the cyberpunk *phenomenon* (*The Soft Machine*, 1985), David Porush examines how punk and New Wave music movements “warned against these cybernetic developments”:

Punks affected a toneless speech, black and white clothes, hair coloured in the impossible colours of plastic; they abhorred tans, preferring the paleness that announces perpetual life indoors, nearer the machines. Their dress incorporated small flashing lights and LED numbers, and they danced with the expressionless and stiff movements of robots, evolving a new machine aesthetic out of their bodies. The technological fears and dreams of an earlier generation, expressed in metaphor, prophecy and fiction, were here incarnated in the *style* of a later one. This style partly relied on its silence. One doesn't talk about high-tech (it's too obvious to mention), one lives inside it. (*The Soft Machine 2*)

Schmitt also discusses the original punk movement as one which rebels against a technological, rationalised and unjust society, and agrees with Porush that this is primarily articulated via fashion ('Mythology and Technology' 65). With regard to the music itself, technology is symbolically turned in on itself via feedback and distortion, and noisy incomprehensible yelling - in cybernetic terms the entropic passage from information to noise is encouraged, not thwarted. His main thrust or assertion is that

the punk rocker seeks to subvert all the values that he or she associates with the established conventions of a corrupt society and looks to re-energise a musical genre once potent but now castrated through commercialisation and hypocrisy. Similarly, Gibson's cyberpunks obscure meaning, attack authoritarian values, and celebrate vandalistic and anarchistic values using computer and other technologies rather than music ('Mythology and Technology' 65).

In this light punk and cyberpunk share a rebellious edge, and offer a critique of consumerism or 'commercialism'. While acknowledging the sentiment we need to recall Jameson's comment about radical articulations in postmodernity, coincidentally also referring to a punk group; how “even overtly political interventions like those of *The Clash* are all somehow secretly disarmed and reabsorbed by a system of which they themselves might well be considered a part, since they can achieve no distance from it” ('Postmodernism' 49). This is in fact some of the built in frustration of punk music- it knows it is “corrupt” already, that it can't escape from the commodity form (and, if one looks at the petty indulgences and lifestyles of the archetypal *Sex Pistols*, comes to revel in its contamination). Punk music doesn't want to “re-energize”, doesn't have the righteousness that Schmitt pins on it and that cyberpunk has.

We see that it is not only the critics who wish to draw on the imbecilic and epileptic rage of punk music to strengthen the name of the cyberpunks. In Gibson and Longo's *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995) we see the creators casting two 'hard-core' music artists - who both bring a post-punk

authenticity with them - as fairly central characters. Ice -T is cast as Jaybone, leader of the Loteks, and Henry Rollins is cast as the Sandinista-type doctor, Spider, who is at the forefront of the battle against the media-disease, NAS, and does voluntary work at the peoples' hospital . We know Ice-T as a much respected (and super-successful) gangsta-rap artist, the voice of angry, streetwise black masculinity, an allegedly genuine gangster and ex-drug dealer from the ghetto, that unquestionable signifier of reality and authenticity. As a countercultural genre, rap, and particularly gangsta-rap, is a black equivalent of the punk music and movement a decade before it, drawing on experiences of unemployment, drugs, street violence, and taking a generalised confrontational and aggressive stance against everything and anyone, including their own. Ice -T is probably best remembered for his notorious mega-hit, 'Copkiller'. Henry Rollins, a white guy who in real life pumps iron (and looks like he suffers from steroid psychosis), also provides a fine 'punk' pedigree, now playing in his own successful 'grunge'<sup>42</sup> group (The Henry Rollins Band) but also playing in less successful, but 'harder', American neo-punk bands in the eighties. White grunge and black gangsta-rap, the two contemporary 'countercultural' heirs of the original punk scene, are thus both metonymically present in the film, their vast generic and semiotic powers deployed, or rather employed, to engorge the sense of authenticity and anarchic rebellion in the film and to sell these as the 'cyberpunk' concept.

### Cybernoia\Paranetics

And even today the notion of a structure lacking any centre represents the unthinkable itself.

Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play'

As we saw earlier on in this chapter Jameson sees cyberpunk in a favourable light, as some new attempt within the parameters of a science-fiction genre to think the world system via the technology network figure. In Katherine Lindbergh's 'Prosthetic Mnemonics and Prophylactic Politics' she reminds the reader that near "the end of *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, he [Jameson] regrets that he did not include a chapter on cyberpunk....the vanguard of a new politics of daring and definition" (59) and that he sees it as at the forefront of a new ideological struggle and critique of capitalism, that moves the battle from the academy onto the street, from the concept to representation. Her tone is sceptical, and with Nicola Nixon's feminist critique of cyberpunk, seems to present a questioning of the revolutionary ethos that Jameson and other critics ascribe to it. The questions we need to ask are, firstly, does the sub-genre actually meet his requirements for a politically engaged art, and secondly, is this genre sufficiently new in its orientation, thematics and style to warrant serious critical attention as a movement, school and genre in its own right?

<sup>42</sup> A contemporary rock style or sub-genre best described as a nineties blend of eighties American rock-heavy metal with seventies British punk

Jameson's reason for celebrating cyberpunk can be pulled apart by dialectical poles of form and content: cyberpunk both evokes and presents the world system. Paranoia - which is dealt with a bit further on - is the figural device with which the sublime beyond of machinations and control is 'suggested', while the Far East is also quite literally present in the commodities, characters, cultures and corporations that populate Gibson's world. There is a Japanese crime syndicate, the Yakuza, who constitutes a significant *actant*, there are Ono Sendai cyberspace decks. While according to Jameson this making manifest what is normally repressed in the ideological point of view of an immediate world of labour-less products (the Other of production), and this literal 'deterritorialisation' of the Orient as geographical Other, could be a positive sign, it could also be read as yet another symptom of the (schizophrenic) collapse of exteriority into interiority, or vice versa, a free-floating anxiety which recognises that the Other is already 'inside'.

Nixon argues that Gibson's representation of 'Japaneseness' is both a continuation of a project of establishing a feminine or feminised Other (cyberspace, family-run corporations, collective organisations) against a fairly conservative Reaganite trope of the individualistic and male 'cowboy' entrepreneur. The whole cowboy genre, with its Wild West scenario, is a fantasy landscape which Marshall McLuhan has already interpreted as the necessary correlate of, and embedded in, a postmodern, hyper-organised socio-economic order.

The celluloid West still plays something of that role in our imagination. It offers equestrian dash and characters of ruthless and exuberant individualism ... The old enemy was a slick feudal enemy. The new enemy is the slick and anonymous machine. To people overwhelmed by industrial scale, the West restores the image of the human dimension. To a commercial society far advanced along the road of monopolistic bureaucracy, the West holds up the primordial image of the lonely entrepreneur. This is why the celluloid image becomes more and more vivid as the historical actuality gets dimmer (*The Mechanical Bride* 156).<sup>43</sup>

Nixon points out how in *Neuromancer* Case as a 'console cowboy' individually takes on the collective Others of the multi-nationals and the Japanese Corporations, and sexually "jacks in" into a feminised cyberspace, and "penetrates" viral ICE, and finally the coveted data banks ("the matrix itself is figured as feminine" ['Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for the Revolution or Keeping the Boys Happy?' 226]). Her reading of the macho cyberpunk cowboy hero defining himself against a feminized and collective (whether it be corporate or domestic-nuclear) Other, is also affirmed by McLuhan. He sees the typical male identity, entangled in a net of social and economic commitments, as feeling threatened

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<sup>43</sup> His reading of the Western and of the nostalgia of postmodern culture seems to corroborate the point made earlier, that Jameson's theory of postmodernism is also indebted to McLuhan. The above passage continues: "Closely associated with these cultural dynamics is the deep nostalgia of an industrial society, a nostalgia bred by rapid change. Obsolescence is a major reality in this kind of world of business turnover... Hair, clothes, educational, and hit-parade patterns are switched faster than the young can grow into them" (156).

in the (post)modern world: "For millions of men horse opera [the cowboy world] presents a reassuringly simple and nondomestic world in which there are no economic problems. In that territory mating, likewise, is a simple affair without elaborate courtship and dating preliminaries" (*Mechanical Bride* 156).

Nixon additionally locates Gibson's Orientalism within a xenophobic isolationism and nationalistic fervour that gripped American media culture in the eighties, expressing fears of Japanese economic expansionism. This force was countered by a sense of the necessity of Japanese investment, a view that led to an "open-door policy to Pacific Rim countries" in British Columbia, Gibson's home. This field of ambivalence, needing yet fearing foreign penetration, not to mention commodities, is what Gibson's brand of cyberpunk emerges out of, in which no simple 'racist' impulse can be construed.

If we examine Gibson's texts within the context of such conflicting interests, we see the degree to which he deliberately avoids any form of simplistic anti-Japanese paranoia or its attendant ethnocentrism. And yet Gibson's Japanese conglomerates, in their collective and familial practice nevertheless form the implicit antagonistic counterpoint to the individualist heroes. The bad guys in Gibson are, after all, the megacorporations - Ono Sendai, Hosaka, Sanyo, Hitachi, Fuji Electric. The good guys are the anarchic, individualistic, and entrepreneurial American heroes: independent mercenaries and "corporation extraction experts" like Turner, console cowboys like Case, Bobby Newmark, Gentry, Tick and the crew at the Gentleman Loser who jack in and out of the matrix with unparalleled mastery. ('Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for the Revolution or Keeping the Boys Happy?' 224)

The same can be said for the wave of Japanese and Asian technological products flooding the North American markets in the eighties, particularly cheap computer equipment. The genius of Silicon Valley is now seen to be threatened by the cloning factories of the East, which manage to replicate hardware the moment it hits the market: the myth rests on and presents an opposition something like "Japanese pragmatism and mass production versus American innovation and ingenuity" (225). The American cowboy in Gibson's cyberpunk survives through sheer 'mastery' of the networks. They've got the hardware but we make the software. If this is paranoia, and a schizophrenic confusion and horror at the conflation of exteriority into interiority, then it is not a variety that agrees with the Leftist politics and criteria of Jameson's project of repoliticisation or cognitive mapping.

If, as Nixon and McLuhan have shown, the figure of the console cowboy is an element within a conservative, nostalgic and nationalistic mythology, and also affirms yuppie entrepreneurial success, it additionally celebrates the emergence of a new brand or class of computer-skilled, or at least computer-literate, *contractors*: programmers, database administrators, systems analysts, computer graphic and multimedia artists and editors, software developers, hardware and networking technicians. The cowboy is a hired hand (sometimes even a mercenary), as is the computer or media worker. The trend in the

above-mentioned sectors is towards contract as opposed to permanent positions: although relatively highly valued and employable as contractors they no longer have the security, both financial and ideological, of life-long commitments to and from single corporations. They are either self-employed, temporary employees (contractors), or else transient employees, temporary in so far as they move around a lot more, migrating from one company to the next in search of the optimum package - contracting is only a possibility because of the interchangeability of these skills. Gibson's 'matrix' or cyberspace is their terrain - the new economic environment and work space which must be mythologically dressed for this new class. The popularity and literalisation of Gibson's fictional neologism to refer to the Internet (or the World Wide Web) is evidence of this affirmative role that cyberpunk plays - or is made to play - in the evocation of 'the paperless office' and the 'new' information society on its way.<sup>44</sup> As suggested above Gibson's 'cyberspace' creation also symbolises in a more allegorical mode the flux and instability of this new labour market, figuring it as a *field* of power, the spatialisation of the economic dangers that confront the free-floating subject cut loose from corporate ties at the cutting edge of a cut-throat late capitalism.

In the previous chapter the identification of the 'paranoid type' as Jameson's preferred variety of schizophrenia (he identifies "high-tech paranoia" of an exemplary 'cyberpunk' art) can now be linked to its specific mode of response to the new reproductive machinery and media networks that characterise the present moment. In *Kaplan and Sadock's Synopsis of Psychiatry* we find an interesting case study of a paranoid schizophrenic whose 'inappropriate' or deviant behaviour stems from his belief that he is the centre of a media-technological surveillance system:

The patient maintained that his apartment was the centre of a large communication system that involved all three major television networks, his neighbours, and apparently hundreds of "actors" in his neighbourhood. There were secret cameras in his apartment that carefully monitored all his activities. When he was watching television, many of his minor actions (for example, getting up to go the bathroom) were soon directly commented on by the announcer. Whenever he was outside, the "actors" had all been warned to keep him under surveillance; everybody on the street watched him. His neighbours operated two "machines"; one was responsible for all his voices, except the "joker". He was not certain who controlled that voice, who visited him only occasionally. The other voices, which he heard many times each day, were generated by that machine, which he sometimes thought was directly run by the neighbour whom he attacked. For example, when he was going

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<sup>44</sup> The argument here is that Gibson's *oeuvre* is both critical and affirmative, wary and celebratory. Gibson's textuality certainly extends further than Jameson and the *Science Fiction Studies* critics - his brand of cyberpunk has a wide 'popular' following or readership, a popularity which can largely be put down to its brilliantly detailed rendering of a whole new futuristic object world, as well as 'colourful' cultural and sub-cultural intricacies. For many readers and viewers this 'form' or detail is really the content, and the politically correct eco-Marxist emancipation 'content' mere form.

over his investments, those “harassing” voices constantly told him which stocks to buy.

The other machine he called “the dream machine”. That machine put erotic dreams into his head, usually of black women. (*Kaplan & Sadock* 472)

In psychiatric discourse persecution, voice hallucinations, thought insertion and thought broadcasting are all recognised symptoms of schizophrenia. But in the above patient’s fantasy we see a distorted reflection or figuration of the actual, unrepresentable world of control that Jameson identifies as both the media network and global capitalism. Porush states that “the most primitive literary response to the threat of cybernetics is paranoia. Cybernetics and paranoia are naturally linked at the most general level because the first threatens to, and the second is threatened by, control through forces beyond the power of the individual” (*The Soft Machine* 85). If we extend this essentially literary model to a greater cybernetic system, then this still holds, and paranoia becomes a response to the multiple networks and systems of postmodern society. The patient’s ‘paranoia’ above is thus the ‘faulty’ representation of a subjectivity striving to “cognitively map” its situatedness or position in the sublime and incomprehensible circuits of power, communication and capital: unfortunately the centreless networks are centred around the illusory centre of the patient. While the machine broadcasting voices directly into his mind is obviously an extension of the new ‘magical’ media, which bombard the subject with a variety of conflicting discourses (and the “other” “dream machine” the more pleasant ‘fantasy’ effects of the same mechanism, television), the voices commenting on his investments seem to compensate for the absent, repressed human and class relationships (and constitute the return of the repressed global tentacles of capital) behind the illusory face of money and commodities, not to mention the even more abstract level of stocks, shares and financial schemes, which constitute “our” (Western) dialogue with foreign populations- earlier we are told that his illness first manifested itself properly after seven months as an investment consultant. In its *inability* to properly represent what cannot be represented the paranoid patient meets Jameson’s requirement of the more ‘energetic’ postmodernism, that it is able “somehow to tap the networks of the reproductive process and thereby to afford some glimpse into a postmodern or technological sublime” (*Postmodernism*’ 37).

Cyberpunk, which seeks and sees similar interfaces with technology, and similarly creates hyperbolic metaphorical worlds and scenarios based on the existing one, and also sees a malignant conspiring other in language and informational machines, whether they be cyberspace or multinationals, manages to “tap the networks” in a similar, paranoid-figural way. Gibson’s fictional world of cyberspace is the perfect example of this technological sublime, where the self loses itself, is finally obliterated (“flatlined”) or temporally transcended (distracted) in the all-consuming matrix. In his ‘Cyberspace and the Sublime’ Jack Voller discusses the way Gibson accesses an older quasi-religious model of the sublime:

In this new romanticism, “sublimity” is accessed not on mountain tops, but through technology, the source and locus of cyberspace, Gibson’s analogue of the infinite and the eternal - the

playground, in other words of the gods. In cyberspace one slips the shackles of body and time ...and cyberspace is defined at one point as “that space that wasn’t space, mankind’s unthinkable complex consensual hallucination....where the corporate hotcores burned like neon novas, data so dense you suffer overload if you tried to apprehend more than the dimmest outline” (*Count Zero* 38-39). This collation of images makes evident the fact that data has acquired the attributes of Yahweh and Jesus- attributes normally associated with mountain-tops, the traditional place of epiphany, and especially for the romantics, of sublime experience” (22).

Voller’s main emphasis is on the religious modulation in this new sublime, and to this end he traces the Voodoo elements that inhabit Gibson’s matrix.. What he doesn’t develop or touch on is the focus on the negative experience of terror or awe, and on the mind’s limited capacity for representation, in the pre-Romantic *theorisation* of the sublime (as we saw in Kant and Burke). In the *Count Zero* quotation above - “mankind’s unthinkable complex consensual hallucination...”, we seem to have a direct allusion to the unthinkability, or the failure of representation, of Kant’s totality of Nature - and possibly Jameson’s revised totality of Capitalism. Indeed the reference to “corporate hotcores [which] burned like neon novas, data so dense you suffer overload if you tried to apprehend more than the dimmest outline” would appear to speak more specifically about a concealed and inaccessible commercial or economic content (in Jameson’s eyes, the ‘secret’ of the economic world system itself ) than any nebulous religious or spiritual beyond.

Complimenting cyberspace the multinational is another threatening Other for cyberpunk. In Gibson’s *Mona Lisa Overdrive* we find the omnipresent multinational Tessier-Ashpool logo appearing on a print-out: “TESSIER-ASHPOOL SA, the typeface regal and spidery” (63). The ominous metaphor of the spider, at the centre of a web, is hinted at to present a picture of the *structure* of capital, to place the multinational corporation at the centre of a sublime and unrepresentably or “unthinkably” complex and centreless money-system and commodity network. One can see why Jameson is attracted to paranoia as a protocritical response; it presents an active attempt to extricate itself from what it sees as the predatory *web* of technology, ideology and discourse that manipulate and regulate subjectivity in postmodernism.

But is this adoption of the paranoid view something new to Gibson and cyberpunk? Lindberg quotes Gibson on the origin of his fictional world from an interview where he describes watching the intensity of kids playing video-games in what she describes as a “cybernetic bio-information loop”. Gibson is reported as saying “It was like one of those closed systems out of a Pynchon novel: a feedback loop with photons coming off the screens into the kid’s eyes, and neurons moving through their bodies, and electrons moving through the game” (‘Prosthetic Mnemonics and Prophylactic Politics’ 61). If we look back to Pynchon, who Gibson appears to acknowledge here quite explicitly as some kind of forerunner of the cyberpunk genre, we find the example of a fully developed paranoid



thematic in which “cybernetic bio-information loops” involve the bizarre combination of different kinds of ‘machines’.

She awoke at last to find herself getting laid; she’d come in on a sexual crescendo in progress....outside a fugue of guitars had begun, and she counted each electronic voice as it came in, till she reached six or so and recalled only three of the Paranoids played guitars; so others must have plugged in. Which indeed they were. Her climax and Metzger’s, when it came, coincided with every light in the place, including the TV tube, suddenly going out, dead, black. It was a curious experience. The Paranoids had blown a fuse (*The Crying of Lot 49* 27).

There is a strange ‘paranoid’ connectedness here in which biological reproduction intersects (in the coincidental ‘blow out’) with electric and electronic reproduction machinery. The television also interfaces with them (their seduction had taken place in front of and involving the plot of a television programme), creating a semiotic network of broadcasting, desire, seduction, plot and the electrical network that joins the television, the rock group ‘The Paranoids’, and the couple. The orchestration of biological and electronic ‘reproductive’ process, sex, broadcasting, amplified music seems to pun on the theory of a culture of simulacra, or the *reproduction* (as opposed to production) process that typifies postmodernism, and which also alludes to a cybernetic view. The cybernetic view of the human machine is shown to share a reductive materialism with schizophrenic desire. Deleuze and Guattari propagate a ‘schizophrenic’ view of the world which sees “not man as the king of creation, but rather as the being which is in intimate contact with the profound life of all forms or all types of beings, who is responsible for even the stars and animal life, and who ceaselessly plugs an organ-machine into an energy machine, a tree into his body, a breast into his mouth, the sun into his asshole: the eternal custodian of the machines of the universe” (*Anti-Oedipus* 4). They see the schizophrenic tapping the logic of desire, a kind of prelinguistic grasp of the world as the combination and interaction of different kinds of machines all involved in some kind of production. In ‘POSTcyberMODERNpunkISM’ Brian McHale maintains that Pynchon is a crucial “feedback loop” between SF and postmodernist fiction, and extremely influential on all cyberpunk: “The presence of Pynchon’s texts, *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973) in particular, is pervasive in cyberpunk fiction at all levels, from the minutest verbal details up to the paranoid world view and conspiracy theory of history characteristic of most cyberpunk fictional worlds” (231). The ‘central’ “paranoid” thematic of cyberpunk, which is also obvious in William Burroughs (‘POSTcyberMODERNpunkISM’ 229), is then much older than cyberpunk - what remains ‘new’ is the dressing, the “high-tech” detail, a sumptuous baroque series of technological ‘digi-tech’ gadget-fantasies, multi-ethnic backdrops, and endless repetition of a tired theme. McHale seems to be suggesting that cyberpunk is like some kind of extended, endless commentary on Pynchon and his cybernetic paranoia.

### **Cybernetics and the Performativity Principle**

Organism is opposed to chaos, to disintegration, to death, as message is to noise

- Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics*

Along with the hegemony of computers comes a certain logic, and therefore a certain set of prescriptions determining which statements are accepted as "knowledge" statements.

Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*

The very ethos of cybernetics, its hidden 'spirit' (or perhaps the more two-dimensional metaphor of 'force' is more appropriate), could well be the emerging cultural *sub*-dominant of the technological sublime that Jameson attempts to identify within the global dominant of postmodernism, and cyberpunk and cybernetic science-fiction of the Pynchon mould the generic forerunners of a now significant aesthetic and mythology criss-crossing and linking genres, as well as different cultural forms (not just literature, but music, film, television and so on). The question that needs to be answered in the following section is: how, specifically, would what we have provisionally called 'cyberhype', in reference to the above-mentioned (and as yet undefined) general cultural style, then relate to the scientific principles or axioms of cybernetics, a specifically scientific or technological discourse? The answer would have to try to map the seepage of cybernetic principles from technological and engineering discourse into other cultural realms.

Cybernetics mobilises and enshrines what has been identified by Lyotard as the 'performativity' principle of legitimisation: cybernetics is thus a technological logic or power which reads social and natural realities as informational machines needing to be regulated and managed according to the 'performativity' principle of optimum performance. It ignores the older concerns of truth, justice and taste, reducing all forms of linguistic practices to communication of information, the various heterogeneous language games and activities to the 'total system'. Lyotard traces a genealogy in which cybernetics is affiliated to a functionalist school of sociology of which Talcott Parsons is the most emblematic theorist; the earlier positivist organic model of society of the nineteenth century French school (Comte et al) was superseded by a mechanical one: "The theoretical and even material model is no longer the living organism; it is provided by cybernetics, which during and after the second World War, expanded the model's application" (*Postmodern Condition* 11).

Discussing the relative merits of the brain and the new computing machines, Norbert Wiener, the father of cybernetics, remarks that "It is thus advantageous to remove, as far as possible to, the human element from any elaborate chain of computation and to introduce it only where it is absolutely unavoidable, at the very beginning and the very end." (*Cybernetics* 118). The obviousness of this prescription hits us, instantly presenting itself as anachronism. We no longer have to argue the validity of replacing human processes or activities with computerised ones; to insist on human labour where a machine is much more efficient no longer has any logical weight, and its inverse, the assertion of the

superiority of computer technology, is just as obsolete. The legitimating principle of performativity or efficiency has quietly triumphed everywhere to the point of becoming transparently obvious (to the point of invisibility) - it doesn't need articulation anymore.

If Wiener's observation-prescription ("it is thus advantageous") appears out of date its appeal to a logic or authority of economic utilitarianism or control according to performativity also seems prophetic: this is of course due to its now all-pervading power in the seemingly separate cultural spheres of art, science and politics, what in early modernity were envisaged as relatively autonomous departments of reason. Both Habermas and Lyotard confront in their separate ways the problem of the legitimation of knowledge or cultural production when these distinct spheres with their own rules lose their autonomy and get replaced by what Habermas sees as all-consuming 'cognitive-instrumental reason', and what Lyotard discerns as the metaprescriptive of performativity or efficiency.<sup>45</sup> Jurgen Habermas recalls Weber's analysis of the emergence of cultural modernity as

the separation of the substantive reason expressed in religion and metaphysics into three autonomous spheres. They are: science, morality, art. These came to be differentiated because the unified world-views of religion and metaphysics fell apart. Since the eighteenth century, the problems inherited from these older world-view could be arranged as to fall under specific aspects of validity: truth, normative rightness, authenticity and beauty. These could then be handled as questions of knowledge, or of justice and morality, or of taste. Scientific discourse, theories of morality and jurisprudence, and the production and criticism of art could in turn be institutionalised ('Modernity - An Incomplete Project' 103).

The domains of these autonomous realms of reason are ruled or controlled by professional specialists. "This professionalized treatment of the cultural tradition brings to the fore the intrinsic structure of each of the three dimensions of culture. There appear the structures of cognitive-instrumental, of moral-practical and of expressive-aesthetic rationality..." (103). If this echoes the Kantian project of the three *Critiques*, Habermas seems to acknowledge the role played by the Enlightenment thinkers in this regard a bit further on in his essay: "The project of modernity formulated in the eighteenth century by the philosophers of the Enlightenment consisted in their efforts to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their inner logic" (103). The project of modernity is, at this point, also founded on the myth of enlightenment of the general public through this specialisation - all of this cultural production will somehow be returned to the masses. Both these characteristics, the

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<sup>45</sup> In the *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* Lyotard examines the contemporary tension between the dominant 'performativity' or 'efficiency' criterion and a new paralogical method, two different forms of legitimating knowledge production. He traces the emergence of the older performativity legitimation through the decline of the older 'myths' of legitimation, the grand Enlightenment narratives of emancipation and totality with its criteria of truth and justice.

drive to systemic totality and to emancipation, constitute Lyotard's prime targets of meta-narrative legitimization in *The Postmodern Condition*.

In Habermas' *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* this theory of heterogeneous rationalities resurfaces in an analysis of the multi-faceted speech act, which appears to respect a Kantian plurality of language games, as well as corresponding 'worlds'. "With any speech act, the speaker takes up a relation to something in the objective world, something in a common social world, and something in his subjective world" (*Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* 313). Unfortunately the status or power of these respective worlds have not developed equally as envisaged by the architects of modernity. The history of Reason has seen the lop-sided growth of the 'objective world' and its instrumental logic of reification; cognitive-instrumental reason, which involves the mastery of a subject over objects, has been overcultivated and overextended beyond its domain through the manipulations of capitalism and rationalisation. Habermas points out how (perversely)

communicative potential of reason first had to be released into the patterns of modern lifeworlds before the unfettered imperatives of the economic and administrative sub-systems could react back on the vulnerable practice of everyday life and could thereby promote the cognitive-instrumental dimension to domination over the suppressed moments of practical reason (*Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* 315).

Rules relating to specifically intersubjective relations, what Kant saw as "practical reason" and its foundational principle of moral freedom, are overwhelmed by the totalising logic of subject-object relations. People are treated as objects, or as merely part of the "objective world" Habermas identifies as the ontological correlate of cognitive-instrumental reason. The identification or delineation of the form of instrumental reason is partly based on the theorisation of reason and rationality of the Frankfurt School, particularly Adorno and Horkheimer's influential *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. What they identify is an instrumental reason which is really the will to power of mathematical language, and which translates the realities of both social and natural worlds into pseudo-concepts or abstractions which are to be administered and calculated according to economic productivity. As Thomas Docherty puts it, "a mathematical consciousness thus produces the world, not surprisingly, as mathematics...Knowledge, conceived as abstract and utilitarian, as a mastery over recalcitrant nature, becomes characterised by power" ('Postmodernism: An Introduction' 6). Adorno and Horkheimer explain that the underlying drive of technological innovation and scientific knowledge is a mastery of Nature, for specific ends: "What men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men . . . power and knowledge are synonymous" (*Dialectic of Enlightenment* 4). Enlightenment Reason dominates both Nature and thinking or consciousness through objectification and abstraction - "Nature.. is that which is to be comprehended mathematically ...mathematical procedure became, so to speak, the ritual of thinking ...it turns thought into a thing, an instrument- which is its own term for it" (*Dialectic of Enlightenment* 24-5).

With the “communicative reason” that Habermas proposes, the validity claims of ‘normative rightness’ and ‘subjective truthfulness’ are allotted equal value to the dominant legitimation of ‘propositional truth’; thus according to Habermas “correlative to the three fundamental functions of language, each elementary speech act as a whole can be contested under three different aspects of validity” (*Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* 313). Of course this is in an ideal and idealistic speech situation in which these three validity claims are equally recognised. What Habermas doesn’t really confront here is the historical mutation of the ‘truth’ claim of a cognitive-instrumental reason dealing with objects into the more technological and production-orientated logic of performativity; a transition which Lyotard accomplishes.

In his book *The Postmodern Condition* Lyotard discards the architectonic thinking of Habermas, and looks at the historically verifiable failure of the Enlightenment myths and the crisis of legitimation: the loss of faith in its grounding or legitimating myths of progress or emancipation, and universality or totality. For Habermas these myths still offer some hope; his proposal is to resurrect them for a co-ordinated cultural programme. But for Lyotard the resort to philosophies of history are no longer adequate. These forms of narrative legitimation of knowledge no longer seem to generate the power or authority they used to: if *modern* is “any science that legitimates itself with some reference to a metadiscourse of this kind making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative” (xxiii) then *postmodern* is “incredulity towards metanarratives” (xxiv). This incredulity arises from both inherent inadequacy and external pressure from new forms of legitimation and validity.

Lyotard traces the crisis of legitimation in the sciences, and observes the widespread acceptance of a new validity criterion (a kind of metanarrative) of ‘performativity’ - “the best possible input-output equation” (*The Postmodern Condition* 46) - or ‘efficiency’ which definitely emerges out of the crisis, although as the handmaiden of technological innovation and capitalist growth since the late eighteenth century it has been around longer (45). This is the legitimation to which systems theory, logical positivism and other positivisms turned: no longer is the question asked “is it true?”, but instead “how efficient is it?”. In his Introduction he describes the newer form of legitimation - one which is premised on control or social ‘management’ according to this principle of efficiency or “maximum performance”, and in its hegemonic status finds a ‘terroristic’ force.

The decision makers, however, attempt to manage these clouds of sociality according to input/output matrices, following logic which implies their elements are interchangeable. They allocate our lives for the growth of power. In matters of social justice and scientific truth alike, the legitimation of that power is based on optimising the system’s performance - efficiency. The application of this criterion to all of our games necessarily entails a certain level of terror, whether soft or hard: be operational (that is, commensurable) or disappear. (*Postmodern Condition* xxiv)

Lyotard doesn't seem to be too keen on this return (almost a full circle) to what Habermas identifies as "unified world views of religion and metaphysics", where the new religion is that of cybernetics or systems theory, in which all language games obey the same principle: "The operativity criterion is technological; it has no relevance for judging what is true or just" (xxv)<sup>46</sup>. This view echoes Adorno and Horkheimer's observation of the amorality of technology: "kings, no less directly than businessmen, control technology; it is as democratic as the economic system with which it is bound up..." (*Dialectic of Enlightenment* 4). Technological improvement doesn't necessarily mean a more just society, in fact (one gets the sense they are implying this) it can mean the opposite.

Against the development of positivism and the efficiency principle, which would appear to still be the dominant (or at least a still powerful) philosophical-scientific vector, Lyotard poses the new trend of postmodern knowledges which unfold without a separate and legitimating authority. Where the determinism of cybernetics, positivism or systems theory presumes stability, predictability the alternative trend acknowledges, even seeks, instability, uncertainty and contradiction.

Science does not expand by means of the positivism of efficiency. The opposite is true: working on a proof means searching for and "inventing" counterexamples, in other words, the unintelligible; supporting an argument means looking for a "paradox" and legitimating it with new rules in the games of reasoning. In neither case is efficiency sought for its own sake; it comes somewhat tardily as an extra, when the grant givers finally decide to take an interest in the case. But what never fails to come and come again, is, with every new theory, new hypothesis, new statement or new observation, is the question of legitimacy. For it is not philosophy that asks this question of science but science that asks it of itself. (*Postmodern Condition* 54)

The new discourse includes its discourse of legitimation, the rules that enable the game, in itself, and is continuously in the process of modifying them, as in the accommodation of paradoxes. In fact it not only includes them but is primarily concerned with the re-examination and revision of these 'metaprescriptives'<sup>47</sup>. External legitimation, the form of legitimation in both the older grand narratives of modernity, and in the performativity rule of positivism, is no longer utilised.

Thus Lyotard ends his discourse on postmodernity with the choice between the technocratic solution in ascendancy, which sees society as a homogenous organism or mechanism, or total system, and the alternative properly postmodern 'project' of endless fission, paralogy and innovation based on

<sup>46</sup> "A cybernetic machine does indeed run on information, but the goals programmed into it, for example, originate in prescriptive and evaluative statements it has no way to correct in the course of its functioning - for example, maximising its performance. How can one guarantee that performance maximisation is the best goal for the social system in every case?" (*Postmodern Condition* 16)

<sup>47</sup> "The function of the differential or imaginative or paralogical activity of the current pragmatics of science is to point out these metaprescriptives (sciences "presuppositions") and to petition the players to accept different ones." (*Postmodern Condition* 65)

local and temporary validity claims, which views society as a myriad of heterogeneous language games (following Wittgenstein).

We are finally in a position to understand how the computerization of society affects this problematic. It could become the “dream” instrument for controlling and regulating the market system, extended to include knowledge itself and governed exclusively by the performativity principle. In that case, it would inevitably involve the use of terror. But it could also aid groups discussing metaprescriptives by supplying them with the information they usually lack for making knowledgeable decisions (*Postmodern Condition* 67).<sup>48</sup>

How do these theories connected to cybernetics? If we stereotype the cybernetic view as one which demands *the replacement of the human with the machine*, or of different language games with the essential characteristic of informational communication, and which assumes the superiority of the technological criterion of efficiency over all others, then these theories all respond negatively to this view. We saw how Norbert Wiener insists that “it is thus advantageous to remove, as far as possible, the human element from any elaborate chain of computation...”. The cybernetic logic is geared towards optimising the system, its central premise or principle is that what is important or valid or “advantageous” above all else is performance. Adorno and Horkheimer claim this - the reduction of knowledge to technology, culminating in Lyotard’s time as the “computerization of society”- amounts to the reduction of thinking as well as the world that emerges from this consciousness: with the scientific Enlightenment (which they see, like Foucault, as the beginning of the technology of human domination) “thinking objectifies itself to become an automatic, self-activating process; an impersonation of the machine that it produces itself so that ultimately the machine can replace it” (*Dialectic of Enlightenment* 25). Against Habermas’ Utopian hopefulness (being able to return to an integrated cultural programme which returns knowledge to the people) one detects the perception of a dominantly cybernetic and technocratic world in Lyotard’s diagnosis of the present leading into the future.

For brevity’s sake suffice it to say that functions of regulation, and therefore of reproduction, are being, and will be further withdrawn, from administrators and entrusted to machines. Increasingly the central question is becoming who will have access to the information these machines have in storage to guarantee the right decisions are made. Access to data is, and will continue to be, the prerogative of experts of all stripes. The ruling class is and will continue to be the class of decision makers. Even now it is no longer composed of the traditional political class, but of a composite layer of corporate

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<sup>48</sup> The solution, to “give the public free access to the memory and data banks”, is coincidentally the same as the symbolic resolution deployed in *Johnny Mnemonic*, where the LoTeks emancipate the data-cure for Nerve Attenuation Syndrome from Pharmakon’s privatised memory banks (via Johnny) , and then broadcast it to the masses.

leaders, high-level administrators, and the heads of the major professional, labour, political, and religious organizations (*Postmodern Condition* 14)

Here again machines replace humans or human processes, but following the Frankfurt School, the new technology doesn't impact on everyone in the same way; it still maintains a socio-political divide between those who have power and those who don't. The system appears to be progressing according to an immanent principle of self-improvement but this enhancement of its powers and performance suits the interests of "the class of decision makers".



## CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A POETICS OF CYBERNETIC FICTION

Yet the city housing projects designed to perpetuate the individual as a supposedly individual unit in a small hygienic dwelling make him all the more subservient to his adversary -the absolute power of capitalism

Adorno & Horkheimer, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment and Mass Deception'

And that no man might buy or sell, save that he had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name

- Revelations 13: 17

From the discussion of the definitions of the cyberpunk concept above one would be justified in discerning a thread of scepticism towards the category in my analysis. Apart from all the problems and contradictions mentioned, cyberpunk often gets reduced to its most prominent and skilful practitioner, William Gibson, a phenomenon objectionable to some but in my opinion symptomatic of the foundational limits (and limited lifespan) of the label<sup>49</sup>. In his article 'Cyberpunk=Gibson =*Neuromancer*' Rob Latham points out that in the collection of essays (from a cyberpunk symposium) called *Fiction 2000: Cyberpunk and the Future of Narrative* most of the 17 papers treated not just Gibson, but even more specifically his most famous work, *Neuromancer*, the first of the Sprawl trilogy, as the locus of their enquiry. He seems a bit disappointed at the fact that "the movement, as a literary practice and a cultural ideology, gets forced into a straightjacket" (266). He doesn't consider the idea that the term itself might be overly rhetorical to start with, and that it might not be able to be stretched much beyond a personal style developed by Gibson and Sterling, plus a few others who have cashed in on the publicity, and the attendant and overzealous critics.

In an age of increasing artistic commodification one has to maintain a certain critical relation towards self or critic-proclaimed declarations of literary or cultural movements. Although one might be tempted to see (postmodern) cyberpunk as a school, style, ideology or movement along the lines of a (Modernist) Futurism or Vorticism, there seems to be none of the earlier group interaction, cohesiveness and process of self-definition; whereas Futurism had a coherent and articulated "cultural ideology" (to use Latham's term) it is difficult to find a similar system of ideas, values and goals in cyberpunk. - there are no manifestos, publications etc. If we are pushed to abstract an aesthetic and ethical framework, something like a critical reaction to the hegemonic cybernetic culture emerges, an ironic cybernetic aesthetic. As has been pointed out this is not peculiar to cyberpunk, but stretches back to include writers such as Pynchon, Burroughs, Philip K. Dick, etc. This does not amount to a wholesale rejection of the usefulness of the cyberpunk category; what I am suggesting is that a more

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<sup>49</sup> It has been noted how in postmodernism, the present is becoming exponentially smaller, more intense and concentrated, as fashion cycles grow shorter, and more cut off from the past. Culture and consciousness are tending towards a series of pure presents, in which continuity is lost, and narrative or memory breaks down.

fruitful context-orientated critical approach would be to emphasise a larger literary (possibly even more generally cultural) formation or corpus, one which doesn't even have to know itself as such, corresponding to more general social and cultural changes. Changes in the technological infrastructure of culture, television, modern film, video, the pop music industry (what Jameson calls the postmodern culture of the simulacrum) broadly define or set the horizons of a new cultural space. Jameson's identification of a postmodernism, corresponding to the third machine age of nuclear and electronic technology seems quite a fundamental and useful historical break in which to locate what has been partially revealed as a cyberpunk aesthetic. This larger formation, of which cyberpunk can now be seen as just the latest manifestation or wave, we might call *cybernetic literature or fiction*, and draws from renegade postmodern high literature, as well as science-fiction<sup>50</sup>.

Returning to Jameson, we see him occasionally substituting the word 'cybernetic' for his term 'postmodern' used for referring to the cultural space produced around and through electronic technology. In his preface to Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, Jameson discusses the three stages of technological production, and mentions the "...third, cybernetic or nuclear variety" (Foreword to *Postmodern Condition* xiii). Here 'cybernetic' seems to be a useful shorthand for the nexus of education, control, and entertainment effected by the media and electronic machines in this new machine age. Although this view of a cybernetic culture only comes to the fore in postmodernism, it is possible to look back into a modernity of control systems predating fully-fledged cybernetic systems. Foucault examines the mode of communication in the space of the school classroom of the classical era and discovers a mode of 'signalization' that operates with a "mechanical brevity" (*Discipline & Punish* 166). It is "a question of understanding the injunction but of perceiving the signal and reacting to it immediately, according to a more or less artificial, prearranged code...a little world of signals to each of which is attached a single, obligatory response...few words, no explanation, a total silence interrupted only by signals" (166). This diagrammatic description of the actual flows of what is essentially and reductively information, a representation of an almost electrical or digital information flow, bears a marked resemblance to a scene in Pynchon's classic proto-cyberpunk novella, *The Crying of Lot 49*: the protagonist Oedipa's experience upon arriving in the recently developed Californian town, San Narciso.

She looked down a slope, needed to squint for the sunlight, onto a vast sprawl of houses which had grown up all together, like a well-tended crop, from the dull brown earth; and she thought of the time she'd opened a transistor radio to replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. The ordered swirl of houses and streets, sprang at her now from this high angle with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had. Though she knew even less about transistor radios than about Southern Californians, there were to

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<sup>50</sup> See Jameson: "...the beginnings of postmodernism, where a new interpenetration of high art and mass culture enables conspiratorial plot-constructions such as those of Pynchon to attain 'artistic' or high-brow standing. (*Geopolitical Aesthetic* 9).

both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of meaning, an intent to communicate (*The Crying of Lot 49* 14-15).

One might be tempted to argue that these two perceptions are completely opposed to each other. Where Foucault reduces a three dimensional discursive situation to the flat functional space of the circuit board, Oedipa 'humanises' the circuit board, giving it the depth of an "intent to communicate".

But what becomes obvious is that the "intent" is really her own projection, the overall effect of her becoming aware of a new cybernetic society in emergence around her. What is common to these two insights is the resemblance or correspondence that Oedipa sees in the circuit board and the planned, structured suburb that causes the flash-back. Lived three dimensional space is collapsed like Foucault's effect. She detects a sameness that exists across completely different products of human enterprise; the difference here that is most conspicuous is the size difference. The micro-world of the electronic circuitry and the macro-dimension of industrialised housing developments. What is significant for Oedipa, almost revelatory - "a revelation trembled just past the threshold of her understanding" (*The Crying of Lot 49* 15), is an "unexpected" perception enabled by a perspective from above, a sight from a "high angle" on a slope. Her elevated perception takes her out of her normal ideological subject-position or point of view within the world of familiarity, the houses, streets and shops of middle-class suburban subjectivity, and gives her a glimpse from outside and above, of the big picture, a sense of design, normally the privilege of the real-estate developer, the military or the 'military-industrial complex', or God. What she sees is the prototype of the machine, the design and manufacturing according to the rules of maximum efficiency and functionality, a recurring systemacy (or city-system) that can be encountered in products of different magnitudes or dimensions including the product or construction of our physical environment. What she perceives is a new, thoroughly engineered space governed by a techno-scientific logic appropriate to the inhuman two-dimensionality of a circuit board. The power of this 'total' cybernetic space is only really evoked in the comparison - the sameness and omnipresence of 'plannedness', of design. Neither technology precedes the other - social engineering and electronic design are part of the same hyper-organised system in which the postmodern subjectivity finds itself - and are thus indistinguishable from one another, existing, to borrow a phrase from Adorno and Horkheimer, as an "*entanglement* of myth, domination and labour [my italics]" (*Dialectic of Enlightenment* 32).

Jameson also refers to the above passage, that famous circuit board scene, a perennial favourite for Pynchon critics, describing his style as a "space in which new cybernetic figures are forged and elaborated: static op-art after images spun off the bewildering rotation of just such cyberplots" (*Geopolitical Aesthetic*, 16). But his project here is to reveal not so much a cybernetic literature as a more general and postmodern conspiracy allegorical form, a type of fiction which unconsciously tries to map the totality of the world system. As one mode among others the narrative representation of cybernetic environments speak about the annihilation of nature and the investment of the object-world

with an “intent to communicate”, as well as the new reproductive machinery itself. Porush’s book, *The Soft Machine - Cybernetic Fiction*, ambitiously attempts to outline a fiction which both emerges out of and confronts the axioms and logic of cybernetics. If, for instance, cybernetics sees language as informational code (and the mind as an input-output device), cybernetic fiction might both start from this and also counter with a view that consciousness cannot be wholly reduced to and adequately expressed as pure information or code (the recurring ‘spirits in the machine’, the voodoo spirits and other ghosts that inhabit Gibson’s otherwise strictly informational zone of cyberspace, seem to speak of this incommensurability). Porush also touches on what I have tried to stress, namely the *real*, historical emergence of a new culture and hegemonic logic of performativity (Wiener’s vision of an applied cybernetics come true), although he doesn’t really go on to develop this “contextual” analysis: “The extremity of cybernetic fiction’s response can only be explained by the extremity of the technology creating its context: cybernetic fiction is a means for the author to present himself or his literature as a soft machine, a cybernaut -like hybrid device, combining human vulnerability and imagination with machine-like determinism” (*Soft Machine* 22). Although this description appears a bit like an elaboration of the central cybernetic figure itself, the cyborg or *cybernetic-organism*, it does go some of the way to showing how cybernetic fiction including cyberpunk - the label now taking on new resonances once again - responds ambivalently to the hegemonic cybernetic ideologue.

If cybernetic fiction and cyberpunk manage to critically engage the new techno-scientific world in emergence around us it is not always done directly. In fact indirect means almost begins to be an absolute necessary criterion for the kind of fiction we have been looking at. Cybernetic fiction could thus be seen as a loosely organised - although stylistically and thematically continuous - attempt to think beyond the familiarised and naturalised present (both geographical and historical) and to constitute a form of ‘political’ postmodernism which doesn’t just *reflect* the new landscapes and spaces of postmodernity or late capitalism. As I have already mentioned, Jameson’s discerning of stronger (essentially more critical) postmodern texts which manage “somehow to tap the networks of the reproductive process and thereby to afford some glimpse into a postmodern or technological sublime” suggests an allegorical mechanism, or the mechanism of the sublime in altered form. Conspiracy is common means for achieving this “glimpse”, because of the growing complexity of social networks and systems, This would seem to provide a fairly reliable criterion for evaluating a text and its right to claim the title of cybernetic fiction -it has to move beyond the bland *representation* of a normalised and neutral object-world for us to consider it as attempting to conjure up the power and awesomeness of the new technology which confronts us as absolute Other.

Cybernetic fiction, as a conspiratorial form thinking the totality via technological figures, could even be extended to what appear to be the antithetical myths of contemporary Christianity. As many critics have pointed out Gibson’s cyberpunk has as one of its favourite targets the reborn televangelism sweeping conservative America: witness the Street Preacher in *Johnny Mnemonic*, played

by a bearded Dolph Lundgren, a cyborg assassin with a passion for crucifixion and other sadisms. Although the Street Preacher has all the trappings of a holy man his ideology hides an evil cash principle and wicked soul. Like wise his externally wholesome muscular body hides the many synthetic implants his earnings pay for. This seems allegorically to speak about Christianity (particularly the evangelical variety) in the Third Machine Age, an anachronistic ideology of anti-materialism apparently resisting technology, but paradoxically centred in and propping up the whole “cash nexus” (Pynchon’s phrase) that is America, and again paradoxically making ample use of the new media and technologies of persuasion.

Ironically, however, cybernetic and cyberpunk fiction seem to bear a family resemblance to the new eschatological discourse and narrative fantasy that is so popular on the American Christian cable channels, the promises and stories about the rapture and the Beast. For example, on the (South African-based) Trinity Broadcasting Network’s menu of American chatshows a favourite topic is the *Book of Revelations*, and the mark of the Beast; countless experts on the Scriptures tell the reader the mark of the Beast, the number 666, is the only way in which the subject will be able to operate and interact in an emergent cashless society (*Revelations* 13: 17). One expert has offered a new reading of the mark, that the number will be *in* as opposed to *on* the hand; the mark is in fact a microchip implant the size of a grain of rice. Describing this on TBN he actually produced a chip, already being used in (and, more metaphorically, on) animals, whose exact location on the globe can be located by the powers that be. The experts talk of a new culture of numbers; numbers rule Christian lives, citizens are reduced to numbers by the Government.

Once again Jameson indirectly provides an insight into this techno-paranoia and credit-phobia, suggesting the more complex the world economic system becomes, the more confused the allegories which try to map it become as well.

Surely the newer spy novels, with their bewildering multiplication of secret or private espionage operations within public ones, their dizzying paper structures (more philosophically dematerialized and ideal than the stock market) turning on the facile but effective device of the double agent, so that whole teams of villains can be more transformed into heroes at the flip of a switch - surely these go a certain way towards declaring at least the intent to construct a narrative which is in some way the *analogon* of the unimaginable overdetermination of the computer itself (*Geopolitical Aesthetic* 16).

What is frightening about the “dizzying paper structures” of virtual money in the apocalyptic vision of the credit system or televangelism’s “cashless society”, is the overwhelming power of the culture of the simulacrum or media to show up the ‘groundless’ foundations of late capitalism. Money is no longer tangible, ownable, real - and the necessary correlate of labour. Reproductive processes can no longer be

separated from productive processes- money is no longer material, concrete, a sign of individual toil and divine reward in the age of instant lottery millionaires, overnight media stars and the infomercial mail-order systems. For this particular televangelical conspiracy genre, which thematically draws on apocalyptic scenarios, but employs the formal elements of the cybernetic paranoid hermeneutic of conspiracy, technology is also the threatening other. Although it claims that technology is the sign of the Beast, we (the hierophants of late Marxism) can invert that so that the Beast is the mark of technology which is the sign of the now even more complicated and unthinkable national and world systems. In a bizarre twist one has to admit that evangelical techno-paranoia is itself a lunge at cognitive mapping in the same vein as cybernetic fiction; its principal tragic character, the shopping cyborg with its 666 implant, awaits damnation at Judgement Day.

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